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MISS LANGLEY'S WILL

VOL. II

RIVINGTONS

London ... ... *Waterloo Place*
Oxford ... ... *High Street*
Cambridge ... ... *Trinity Street*

MISS LANGLEY'S WILL

A Tale

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

RIVINGTONS
London, Oxford, and Cambridge
1869

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CHAPTER XI.

ARRIVED once more at his ancestral halls, the head of the house of Donnington dwelt in dignified seclusion, his "womankind" clustered around him, a dispirited, disunited band. Lady Arabella, still bitterly resenting the wrongs she imagined herself to have received at kindred hands, was yet more incensed at being involved in the chastisement she had drawn down on the supposed delinquent. Of the comfort of Catherine's companionship Lady Emma was almost wholly deprived now, when she most needed it; for the Marchioness soon after her arrival was attacked by a severe illness, and claimed the closest attendance. Pensively pacing the gallery of family portraits, the captive maiden, day

1 3

after day, recalled the last few months in their too rapid, happy course, or tremblingly, almost despairingly, asked herself what the future might have in store. That stern grandsire who scarcely vouchsafed her word or look, could he possibly relent? The stately presence of his forefathers, grim in armour, or stiff in gold and brocade, seemed one and all to answer for him, "No!" In the lines of her father's countenance only could she fancy a more lenient reply. It was the portrait so much admired by Catherine in former years, and often would she stand fixedly gazing on it, indulging this soothing imagination, fostered as it was by her lively remembrance of a past reality: his deep indulgent fondness. She pined for intelligence from London, and yet dreaded it, conveyed, as it only could be, through the medium of Miss Dallas. That faithful friend commenced her first letter by an apology for tardiness.

"But, in truth," she proceeded, "I waited only till I had seen HIM. We met last night at the Scudamores. Would you wish to know how he looked? Why, really, my dear, considering his

forlorn condition, wonderfully well! Rather paler I thought at first, but on more heedful attention I saw it was only the effect of the light above his head. He did not dance often, only twice, I think, with Lady Blanche Bellasis. By the way, you will be pleased to know that I have completely come round to your opinion concerning her. She certainly has, as you say, very fine eyes, which are capable of a great deal of expression sometimes. In justice to myself, however, I must say that I never before saw her look so well: that animated discourse showed her off to the best advantage. A wonderful intimacy has sprung up between her then partner and her youngest brother, Lord Charles. It is quite amusing to see the youth endeavouring to assume the air, the step inimitable. However, the union is so close that there is some talk of their making a continental tour together. A strange scheme! but the younger lord's papa is most weakly indulgent to his children. He certainly sanctioned Lady Mary's marriage, desperately imprudent as it was.

"But the gossips, I must tell you, have made out a still more startling arrangement for your

adorer's autumn. What do you think of their associating him and Sir George Montford, Lady Belmont, and your accomplished aunt, the Viscountess, in an expedition to Egypt and Syria? True indeed—that is, I mean, it is true that they do say so: the report really is rife among us. They give the highest personage of the supposed party the credit for being the originator; they say the sages around her have inspired her with a passionate desire to see the Pyramids. But I, for one, disbelieve the story altogether, though Lady *C.*, no doubt, *can* do rather strange things when the whim takes her.

"To come at the rights of these romances, for your sake, dearest, I went so far at last as actually to challenge him to satisfy me; but he answered so evasively that I was none the wiser. In your case I do really think I should be strongly tempted to *infringe*——"

Lady Emma at this point indignantly flung from her the tormenting letter. But it was soon again taken up, and carefully studied, till, notwithstanding all efforts of reason, or struggles of confiding tenderness, it had produced the full effect

on which the writer had calculated. There was anguish in the first suggestion, another and more favoured suit; but from the thought of the Eastern expedition planned as it was represented to be, she recoiled in absolute horror. Yet her spirit was too high to permit her in answering the letter to take any notice of either report. From her aunt of Ilminster she flattered herself the truth might be elicited. She accordingly framed a few ingeniously indirect remarks, likely, she hoped, to draw forth some accurate intelligence. The eagerly expected answer arrived on the fourth day: having just seen that it was unusually long, even for her Grace, who was noted for being diffuse in epistolary communication, she laid it aside till it could be uninterruptedly enjoyed. Thus it began:—

"How shamefully I am in your debt, dearest child! Two charming letters left unacknowledged! My best excuse is—hurried to death, as one always is towards the end of the season. I miss you deplorably, love; so do other persons too, let me tell you! One princely guest last week was exceedingly gracious: his Royal Highness's first question to me was, "What had become of my

very charming niece?" He repeated the inquiry on sitting down to table, which, to be sure, was not quite so well: but the compliments of royalty have a value of their own. But, dearest girl, do tell me how you are going on? You don't know how anxious I am about you, situated as you are. To make it clearer: you know that tall, angular sort of woman who sits very near us at the chapel? but you do not know that when girls we were rather intimate, being neighbours in Dorsetshire. The alteration in her is really deplorable. She was then a rather striking figure—not by any means correct, but one that dressed well, a little in the French style. You may guess, by the look of her now, what she has become; and it all began in a month's seclusion with a sick grandmother. So, dearest Emma, I entreat, don't let them entice you into their ways—don't take up their books. I can give you a charming list. Indeed, indeed, I do pity you! I know the tedium of the place. But I can promise you one comfort—I have quite determined to ask Auntie Arabella. I can offer no special inducement, neither a *certain Duke*, nor an *Earl* I *could name;* but I think she will come

—any thing rather than home! Our own plans are still undecided. I fear I shall hardly get the Duke to Baden. He thinks himself perfectly well, and so, just now, he may be; but there is something of enlargement about the middle joint of one finger, which certainly is symptomatic. Prevention is better than cure. It *is* vexing to find him so unpersuadable; and the more because, as it happens, there will be a remarkably pleasant set of people there. And really, if we don't go, I see no prospect of a change from Beaulieu for more than a week or two at a time, till spring comes round. Dreary, dreary work indeed! As for September, I quite shiver at the thought of it! The place, I own, is not what can be fairly called damp—the Duke has spent immense sums in drainage; but, after all, the lake itself remains, and I am quite sure is exceedingly prejudicial to me. I know Vaughan thinks so, though for fear of displeasing your uncle he rather suppresses his opinion. And then the sameness! four or five months in one place—it would have been almost too much for the Garden of Eden!

"The Lydcotes are not off yet. I called

yesterday, and found her very much harassed. They had sent the children down to the Hall, properly attended, as they supposed; but it seems, through some abominable carelessness, one of the little boys caught cold, and it has ended in an inflammatory attack, which makes his poor mamma quite uneasy, and delays their voyage most inconveniently. So cruelly provoking! time short, decidedly, for what they propose, and she so dreads encountering the equinoctial gales in the Bay of Biscay. They were very nearly lost there last year, and she declares another such fright would certainly kill her. But such a description of the yacht! Small, but so delightfully fitted up. Indeed the narrowness of room is half the charm: every thing so nicely adjusted, so amusingly compact! A dear little *bijou* of a library, for instance, all duodecimo. In short, her graphic sketch of the little fairy bark sent me away half dead of envy, for I have pined for one all my life. Yachting was my father's passion, and in my maiden days I quite reckoned upon having one of my own. But unfortunately the Duke has never been *d'accord* with me on

this matter; for, having no connexion with the maritime counties, he did not acquire the taste in youth. I regret it the more now that he approaches the time of life at which, as Vaughan says, hunting becomes a serious trial to a man's constitution. If he could but perceive what an excellent substitute for that hard exercise pleasure-voyaging might be! My own inclination is a mere feather in the scale, though I certainly should delight in a Mediterranean cruise. So much as I could make of it! the inexhaustible hints it would afford! And all the world but I to enjoy it! Really, it is growing only too common—the Bosphorus and the Bois de Boulogne almost equally familiar! But so it is, my dear: the current never runs smoothly with any of us, believe me. As a dutiful wife submission is my part—submission and Beaulieu *pour toujours!*

"I have been much harassed these last few days: the whole household, it seems, are in arms against my poor page Antonio. Jealousy, I suspect, is the real ground of complaint, but they pretend to allege certain malpractices. The housekeeper assures me, for example, that that unaccountable

delay which you may remember on the occasion of the birthday drawing-room, was entirely owing to the coachman's missing a new pair of knee-buckles, which, on the threat of a sound horse-whipping, Signor Antonio at last produced from some repository of his own! Now this story certainly does look awkward, knowing well, as the boy does, that knee-buckles are no part of his dress. A sad, graceless little rogue! How hard to believe it, with those pleasant bright eyes! The depravity of the age is really shocking. At present his depredations do not seem to have extended to any thing of value, but it makes me very uneasy. I hardly know how to act. I have given him a hint, however, taking occasion, as he waited at breakfast, to speak impressively on the subject of honesty. I am sure he quite understood me, and should have gone on a good deal longer if the Duke had not begun to look so surprised that I was afraid of an inquiry, which I knew would have ended in the naughty youth's immediate dismission. I certainly should regret very much to part with him while his height and size fit

the place so exactly. So indulged as he has been, it really is hardly conceivable!"

It is needless to proceed further in the transcript of her Grace's effusions. Suffice it to say that they contained not the slightest notice of poor Lady Emma's inquiries. Carefully veiled as she had thought them, her aunt had either overlooked them altogether, or seen through them too well.

But light broke in from an unexpected quarter: the family physician strongly advised Lady Donnington's making some stay at Leamington; and, utterly distasteful as it was to her Ladyship, her husband's authority obliged her to adopt the suggestion. It was not known at first whether his Lordship would fix on daughter or granddaughter to remain at home with him; but to the scarcely disguised displeasure of the former, his choice fell on her. The latter learnt his decision with a thrill of intense joy. At a place of general resort she could not be, as at Donnington, wholly unapproachable: the excursion would therefore be a test of Lord Henry's constancy. If, supposing him to be still within the four seas of Britain, he hurried not to

Leamington so soon as her arrival should be duly notified, why, then there was indeed no truth in man, and she would believe the very worst her friend Elizabeth could suggest!

CHAPTER XII.

THE Marchioness, sunk in dejection, hardly cared to be relieved from the maladies it had brought upon her. The difficulties she threw in the way were so numerous as to make it doubtful if the proposed plan would ever take effect. The agent employed to select a house could find none that would answer. The first was rejected as being on a much larger scale than her Ladyship desired, intending, as she did, to live in strict retirement; the second "would not accommodate half her suite." The capital defect of the third was that of being without the town: the fourth was too near the centre. But the Marquis at length interfered to adjust the difficulty: a short residence at an hotel might enable her to decide according to

her own inclination, or if not, might continue to be her abode during her stay. Meantime the plan had been sufficiently talked of to find its way into the public journals, insomuch that their arrival was formally announced three days before it actually took place.

The Marchioness and Lady Emma had an immediate visitant, Lady Margaret Vere, glad to welcome the one for the sake of the other. The vicinity of Lillesmere House, the family seat of the Baronet, had had no little share in the Marquis's fixed determination to send the party to Leamington. The Marchioness did not trouble herself with affecting any pleasure in the meeting: her discourse was little more than a catalogue of complaints. She not only disliked the town, and all belonging to it, but disparaged even the beauty of the richly-wooded scenery around. Lady Margaret warmly espoused the defence of her county, and as she vaunted its especial claims to veneration, looked for sympathy to her younger relative, and was not wholly disappointed: Stratford-on-Avon had its due respect there.

But Warwickshire had at that moment a charm for Lady Emma beyond any with which the shade of our great bard himself could invest it. Might not the premature announcement of their arrival have already brought Lord Henry thither —perhaps to that very house? Restless with a desire to ascertain this point, she could not forbear asking Barnes, as she prepared for rest, if there were many other persons now staying at the hotel. The woman who, excited by the novelty of her present circumstances, was in an especially communicative mood, eagerly answered a question which was not put without much of anxious hesitation: "Yes; the hotel was very full," she was told; and she named various people of distinction come, or coming immediately. Her young mistress ventured a little further.

"The apartments adjoining the Marchioness's room are not occupied, I think?"

"No; very luckily; my Lady being so particular about quiet. Yet, now I remember, they are taken too. Some gentleman, some Lord, I think they said, wrote down from London to engage

a suite in a great hurry. I only hope he will give her Ladyship no disturbance."

This intelligence having been extracted, the offices of the toilet proceeded in silence, till Lady Emma alarmed her handmaid by a sudden start.

"Oh, dear, my Lady! did I hurt you? This lock, to be sure, is a little entangled, but I didn't know I had pulled so very hard."

"You did not hurt me at all; I was only rather startled by some noise."

"A noise!" echoed the *femme-de-chambre*, looking around the strange apartment with strong signs of panic.

"There is nothing to fear," said Lady Emma, smiling at her trepidation. "If I did hear any thing, it was without doors—only a sound of wheels."

"And so it is, I do declare!" said the waiting-maid, pausing to listen. "Your Ladyship's hearing is so very acute! Some travellers arriving at this late hour: ten to one but they'll wake my Lady in a fright—and she so nervous as she is now! They're driving up to the door. I could see

them by only drawing this curtain the least bit aside."

Her fingers were already outstretched: she wanted but a word or half-word of permission; but Lady Emma forbade the indulgence of unwarrantable curiosity.

"No, Barnes! leave the curtain as it is. You forget that the house is open to all comers: it would seem like watching the proceedings of strangers."

"I beg pardon," answered the object of the admonition. "No doubt, as your Ladyship says, *we* have no concern with any body about us; only these people's coming at such an out-of-the-way sort of hour! They do seem to be tramping along here, too. I do suppose it is the gentleman who has taken those rooms."

Lady Emma was glad that she had set up so high a standard of propriety. Had she spoken, it could scarcely have been with a steady voice, so intently had she listened to each succeeding sound —to the voices in the hall below, the steps ascending the stairs, and now passing her own door. It was but the heavy treading occasioned by carrying

along luggage, yet amidst it all she fancied she distinguished one well-known elastic footstep. Dreading lest she should betray some signs of agitation, she speedily dismissed Barnes.

Alone, she continued long to pace the room, revolving every circumstance connected with this nocturnal arrival. It was but reasonable to allow that many another lord might engage apartments in an hotel at Leamington, yet so strong was her persuasion that she had identified her neighbour that she even practised herself in anticipation, standing before the glass in the act of hearing the intelligence from Barnes next morning, with an utterly unmoved countenance. It was a wasted study: she had the mortification to find that her caution against undue curiosity had produced an abiding impression. The waiting-maid, when again at her post, seemed determined to prove that she could be as demurely discreet as she had been familiarly loquacious, and said not a word beyond the line of her duty.

One circumstance was satisfactory, at all events, whoever their fellow-inmate might prove to be—his unseasonable coming had not disturbed the repose

of the Marchioness. Her Ladyship had slept well after her unusual fatigue, and was in very tolerable humour, insomuch that, the morning being fine, she observed to Catherine that as she supposed Lady Emma would never be satisfied till she had seen "that place," meaning thereby Kenilworth, they might as well go thither at once. But she stipulated on being early, so as to escape all other visiting parties. Accordingly they set out considerably before noon; but when they had nearly reached their destination another carriage was heard behind them. It dashed swiftly past; and Lady Donnington exclaimed, "Somebody bowed to us from that carriage; I am sure of it! I have a great mind to turn back."

Lady Emma, into whose cheeks those following wheels had called a lively bloom, now eagerly scanned the carriage in advance. An instant assured her that it had no particular interest for her; but being much averse needlessly to lose her morning's amusement, she ventured to say, "Indeed, Lady Donnington, I do hope you are mistaken! The livery, which is uncommonly showy, is quite unknown to me."

Further than this she dared not carry her pleading; but her countenance so expressively seconded it, that the Marchioness relented, and they went on. On arriving, however, no doubt could be any longer entertained. The party who had preceded them, consisting of two ladies, awaited their approach in front of the entrance-gate.

"There, Emma!" said Lady Donnington, as soon as this became apparent; "I hope you are convinced now: they are actually waiting for us, and one of them is making signs in a strangely familiar sort of way!"

"It does look like it, I own," said Lady Emma, very humbly; "but there must be some mistake: they suppose us, no doubt, to be different persons."

Lady Donnington drew up her head at the suggestion. Little value as she believed herself now to entertain for worldly distinction, somehow the being confounded with unknown, untitled personages was not quite a matter of indifference to her.

"I do think, Miss Mansfield," said she, upon closer observation —"yes, I am all but sure that

it is you who are favoured with this gracious notice."

"I!" answered Catherine, in much surprise: "your Ladyship must surely be mistaken."

"No, Miss Mansfield; I am no more mistaken now than I was before," was the sharp reply. "I can plainly see that all that nodding and smiling is meant for you; and since so it is, I shall be happy if you will dispose of the matter as speedily as possible. They will, perhaps, have the consideration not to detain you very long."

Accordingly, on alighting, Catherine joined the strangers. The mystery was then at once solved: one of them proved to be the mistress of Beechwood Manor.

"Your servant, Miss Mansfield," said she, with a mock curtsy. "It's some years since we met, but I didn't think I was so wonderfully altered as not to be known."

"You are very little altered; but at that distance, and not expecting to see you——"

"Well, no offence is taken: happy to meet you! But how comes it about? You were going into Yorkshire, I thought."

"I was; and I remained there ten years. I left it only a few months ago."

"And pray who is it you are with now? Whose carriage is that?"

"The Marchioness of Donnington's."

"Then, Lucy, you are right after all," said Miss Langley, turning quickly to her companion. "My young friend here, Miss Clare, maintained she saw a coronet on the panels."

"I said I thought so," gently interposed the young lady.

"Well, it seems you saw better than I; but if people of rank will go skulking about in that way they can't complain if they don't meet with proper respect: a coronet no bigger than a pin's head! Donnington! was not that the name—the title of the family you had just left when I saw you last?"

"Yes; it is the same."

"Staying with them, eh? In great favour, then, I suppose."

"You probably mistake the case. I am not Lady Donnington's visitor: I reside with her as a companion."

"Oh, a different affair, to be sure Pray, what

sort of woman is my Lady—pleasant, sociable? I should not dislike an introduction—not so much for my own sake as this girl's. It may be good for her to get acquainted with such folk."

Catherine, feeling for Miss Clare's mortification at this remark, replied only, "Lady Donnington is a confirmed invalid: her object in coming here is the improvement of her health."

"Which, I'm happy to say, is not my case," rejoined Miss Langley. "What I seek is only a little change and diversion. But I won't detain you longer: her Ladyship yonder looks as if she was getting rather impatient."

Catherine remained only to make a hurried inquiry after Mrs. Falconbridge. She gained no intelligence: with an altered countenance Miss Langley said, "I have not heard for a length of time. They are somewhere in France."

The tone of the answer struck Catherine as peculiar; but she could make no further investigation, for the Marchioness though walking on, frequently looked back towards her—a hint not difficult to be understood.

"Well," said Lady Emma, "have you made

peace? Has your friend forgiven your forgetfulness?"

"We parted on good terms; but I am hardly entitled to call her 'friend:' our acquaintance is very slight."

"She seems to be a woman of fortune," remarked Lady Donnington, rather more curious than she cared to own.

"Who is she?" frankly asked Lady Emma.

"Her name is Langley: she is very rich."

"Which she seems desirous to make known. Rather newly acquired probably," said the Marchioness.

"Your Ladyship is not mistaken. Her fortune was the acquisition of her father: he was an eminent merchant."

"So I surmised. That ostentatious display is a mark of the class."

Lady Emma, not liking the tone of this remark, endeavoured to soften it by admiring Miss Clare, of whose figure they had a good view as she walked away for the tour of inspection. A slight survey of the ruins satisfied Miss Langley, and the Marchioness, unlike as they were in other

respects, agreed with her in this indifference. Having come hither, however, to please Lady Emma, she allowed the latter time to trace the principal points of interest, and even to make a slight sketch while she proceeded on her own very slow circuit. The artist was soon deeply absorbed in her work, and the truths and romance connected with the scene had so withdrawn her from personal concerns that some one actually drew near, came close to her, his shadow falling on her paper, before she raised her eyes. With that look all incertitude vanished—Lord Henry stood again before her! nor could she for an instant doubt that his coming was not accidental. But the deep delight quickly gave place to fear. He was too rash. The Marchioness—there she was—just turning the angle of that wall—she must see!

"Oh, go! leave me!" cried Lady Emma, in extreme alarm.

The moment was indeed critical: the most rapid movement could not enable him to escape unseen. He therefore judged it better to remain calmly where he was, affecting to be absorbed in contemplation of the scene. He did not know

the Marchioness, and had some hope that she would not recognize him; but he was in his way too remarkable to have been overlooked even by her, as her glance of indignation at once apprized him. Nevertheless, preserving an air of easy composure, he withdrew but slowly from her presence. It was very different with Lady Emma: her embarrassment would alone have betrayed the truth. Without daring to behold the expression of the Marchioness's face, she yet felt what it was. Her trembling fingers became unequal to their task; the wall she drew swerved fearfully from the perpendicular; the pencil dropped. Catherine's ready hand replaced it in hers.

"Thank you," said she, looking only at the drawing; "but I am doing it very ill: I shall make nothing of it. Do not let me detain you, Lady Donnington."

The Marchioness replied, with an affectation of gentleness more cutting than the unrestrained expression of anger, "I am in no hurry. I should be extremely sorry to prevent your accomplishing what has so deeply engaged you."

This occasioned a second fall of the pencil.

"How very troublesome I am to you, Miss Mansfield!" said Lady Emma, endeavouring to hide her confusion by a laugh: "my hand is so unsteady."

"Some nervous affection, perhaps," said the Marchioness, in a tone still more pointedly significant.

Hastily collecting her whole apparatus of design, Lady Emma now exclaimed, "I will give it up! Lady Donnington, I am quite ready."

The Marchioness said no more; and they departed. Once in the carriage, Lady Emma hardly knew whether her companions talked or were silent, and found herself in the midday bustle of a modern town almost before she was aware of having quitted the time-worn relics of Kenilworth. In the solitude of her own apartment her late doubts and fears rose to memory but the more strikingly to enhance the felicity of that moment which had dissipated them entirely. The entrance of her waiting-maid awakened her from her dreams: perhaps her countenance betrayed something of their tenour, for the woman hastened to apologize for her appearance.

"I beg pardon! I suppose I was mistaken, but I thought it was this bell that rang."

"No, it was not," answered Lady Emma, as soon as she could call to mind that she did sometimes ring a bell.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," replied the woman; "but"—pausing with her hand on the door—"I thought your Ladyship might be in a hurry about packing."

"About packing!" when the business of unpacking was but just accomplished. What could be the meaning of so inopportune an inquiry?

It was soon explained. The waiting-maid hastened to disclose all she knew, her curiosity being yet further stimulated by her having thus dexterously ascertained her young lady's utter ignorance of the affair. The Marchioness, it appeared, immediately on her return to the hotel had directed her own woman to have every thing ready for her departure early next morning.

"Her Ladyship, I suppose, don't find the waters suit her case; though, if I might presume to say so, as she has taken them but once, it's almost too soon to judge."

Then, not unobservant of the silent dismay in which her intelligence had been received, she

ventured to add, "There's been no bad news from the Castle, I hope, my Lady?"

"No; I believe not; I have heard none."

"Dear me!" rejoined the inquisitive Barnes, with the familiarity of long-service; "then it *is* very strange indeed! It must be some sudden dislike my Lady has taken to the place. Does your Ladyship wish me to prepare at once?"

"No; I do not yet understand this matter: I must inquire into it."

She hurried to Catherine's room, too conscious of the probable cause of this hasty resolve. But the search was vain. Her friend was with her foe: to see the one she must face the other. It was a great effort, but the extremity was desperate; she went to them accordingly. An expressive look from Catherine assured her of the truth of the information just received, and, laying her hand on the table at which the Marchioness was writing, to support herself in a fit of actual trembling, she succeeded in saying, "Excuse me for interrupting you, Lady Donnington: I have just heard that you intend to leave this place immediately; is it true?"

"Quite true," replied the Marchioness, adding, in her most freezing accents, "I believe I forgot to mention it to you. I hope it has caused you no inconvenience!"

"Oh, what will Lord Donnington say?" exclaimed Lady Emma, in utter consternation.

"I shall take all possible care to prevent any ill consequences. I am now writing to prepare him. You may be very sure," she proceeded, raising her eyes for a steadfast gaze of displeasure, "that I shall not inform him of the whole facts of the case. I could not bear to tell him that his granddaughter has been found capable of carrying on a clandestine correspondence with one whose addresses he most absolutely and most justly disapproves!"

This was insupportable. The face blanched with apprehension now flushed with indignation. Lady Emma quitted the room without reply. So deep, indeed, was her sense of resentment at such a reproach that Catherine, coming to her about half an hour afterwards, could not first soothe her into her natural temper of d. Her hands still covered her face, as she

repeated, "Clandestine correspondence! I do not so much as know his handwriting!"

"It was unjust, my dear Emma; but she is now convinced of it, I do assure you."

"She should not have needed to be convinced; she should never have suspected it."

"She would not, if she knew you as I do. But you must make fair allowance on your side. The circumstances to some extent justified suspicion. I was certain that the meeting was entirely accidental, as far as you were concerned; but I could not answer as much for Lord Henry."

"No," answered Lady Emma, blushing; "I believe he did observe and follow us. But do we indeed return to-morrow?"

"No; the Marchioness has given up her intention."

"Oh, what a relief!"

"But, my dear Emma, your situation here will require great prudence. It cannot be doubted that you are the object of his coming."

A brilliant smile of conscious joy assented to the remark.

"Another such meeting," proceeded Catherine,

"and what has been threatened will undoubtedly occur."

"There is no chance of it," replied Lady Emma: "even then it was but for a moment. But, my dear, kind friend!"—kissing her affectionately—"how grateful I ought to be to you for having preserved me! How should I have borne to return to Donnington in such disgrace? You are just what you used to be to me. If I had not you, what would become of me?"

Catherine's assurances had in some degree pacified the Marchioness; but, knowing now that Lord Henry was an inmate of the same hotel, she at once resolved on quitting it. In the course of the day she saw a house far less commodious than any of those she had previously rejected unseen, but with which in the present exigency she was well enough contented, and whereunto she and her suite removed before nightfall. Had the proprietor of the hotel known the cause of her hasty departure, he would have looked somewhat askance on the young nobleman who still honoured it with his stay.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY EMMA soon found that she had little more of real liberty to expect than when confined within the limits of her grandfather's domain. The church was the only public building she was ever permitted to enter, and in the daily drives it was the Marchioness's anxious object to elude Lord Henry's pursuit. But this vigilance effected nothing towards discouraging the attachment: that one brief interview with her lover had dispelled all the phantoms which had previously haunted Lady Emma's imagination, and confirmed his hold upon her heart.

The Marchioness came to Leamington prepared to dislike it, and fully acted up to her intention. Indisposition and love of change had drawn

together a good many persons with whom she had some degree of acquaintance; and their undesired companionship went far to neutralize in her case the beneficial effects of the spring. One individual she met with occasioned her particular annoyance—Lady Coningsby's aunt, the elder Miss Lisle. The success of this lady's grand enterprise had been most disastrous to herself. The victims of her scheming, almost equally galled by the matrimonial yoke, agreed but in this—to close their doors against her who had contrived to impose it upon them. Thus cast off where she had expected to stand most secure, poor Miss Lisle had the mortification to find herself almost universally dropped. The supreme honour of having become actually allied to nobility by displaying conspicuously her talent for manœuvring, alarmed the prudence of every family whose notice she valued. Reduced in consequence to depend on her own proper means of subsistence, she shifted her abode from one place of public resort to another, attaching herself for the time to any dignified or wealthy personage who would condescend to accept her assiduities.

But she found at once it would be hopeless to attempt this with Lady Donnington.

"Her assurance is really inconceivable!" said her Ladyship, in high disdain. "She does not, I hope, reckon *me* in the list of her connexions? Pray, Miss Mansfield, have the goodness whenever we do meet to interpose yourself between us. There are some people it is difficult to keep at a distance."

But with another resident Miss Lisle found considerable favour. Having established herself in one of the largest mansions, Miss Langley lived in corresponding magnificence, and became a magnet of powerful attraction. At a chance meeting at a library, she remarked to Catherine, "I have found out another way to your Marchioness, if I choose to make use of it. There's a certain Miss Lisle here, a pleasant, conversable little woman enough, who tells me that she has the honour of being related."

For this assumption Catherine was not quite prepared, and her countenance involuntarily expressed some surprise.

"Isn't it true?" asked Miss Langley, with some

quickness: "I don't want to get acquainted with a false pretender, which is likely enough to happen at a place like this."

"Why," replied Catherine, "the connexion is so very remote, and there is so little disposition to acknowledge it that——"

"Oh, that's another affair!" interrupted Miss Langley: "if it's only my Lady's pride to a poor relation, I don't care. Miss Lisle's not being rich enough to be noticed does her no harm with me. I choose my friends as I like; and if she's really a woman of family, I sha'n't turn my back upon her. I find her both pleasant and useful. She has seen a great deal of the world, knows every thing and every body—just the handy sort of person one wants at such a place. I rather think, indeed, of carrying her back with me; but that won't be yet. I shall make a good long stay."

Catherine did not think herself justified in exposing the faults of another when such information was rather rejected than invited. She only replied, therefore, "You seem at present to be provided with *one* agreeable companion—that young lady

I see so much with you—very pretty and pleasing!"

"Very true; she suits me well enough in her way too. Better, if she was rather more merry; but, poor thing! there have been family troubles. Her father Humphrey Clare was my man of business for years, and might, I should have thought, have made a pretty good thing of that alone; but somehow or other, though he gave me no cause to complain, he sadly mismanaged his own affairs—left a large family to shift for themselves. The widow thought proper to remove hither—masters for the little folk, you know"—nodding significantly. "However, finding them settled on the spot I made a point of being civil. The girl certainly is very much admired. I shouldn't like to carry about a dowdy little fright; but she sets things off well. I must always have some young people about me: I can't live without them. That's one reason why I came here. I was moped to death at Beechwood. I don't know what's come to the neighbourhood: I used to find it easy enough to get a cheerful party together all the year round; but now, some are gone here,

some there, and those that are left are not the same people they were."

"Grown older, possibly," suggested Catherine, with a smile.

"Well, I don't know; it may be that with some of them; but anyhow I couldn't endure it any longer: I was absolutely driven to go where one sees something of gay doings. I was never here but once before: the town's prodigiously spread since then. It is, let me see, how many years?—no matter, however. The only fault I find is the number of sick people. I don't like to be crossed every five minutes by some dismal-looking figure, half a spectre already!"

A pause here intervening, Catherine asked again if any news had been received from Mrs. Falconbridge.

"None; and I don't expect any," was the curt reply. "How is it you don't hear yourself? I thought you were great correspondents."

"No; Maria never wrote often, and for a long time I have not had a line from her."

"That's pretty much my case. I declare I don't know where they were when I last heard. I can't keep those French towns in mind."

"I sometimes think there may have been a loss of letters," said Catherine.

"Likely enough, wandering as they do. And you've not seen her these ten years? You'll find her much altered then: she's not at all the woman she was, I can tell you."

This remark grated hard upon Catherine's feelings. The inevitable decay of beauty, however well supported by its possessor, can never fail to occasion regret in those who have delighted in its bloom. It was painfully strange to find Miss Langley noting so unconcernedly the diminution of that perfection on which her partiality had been originally founded.

"I don't mean to say," she resumed, not altogether unconscious of the effect her last words had produced on her auditor, "that she's not still a very fine woman. There's that about her that she can't altogether lose; but she frets away her beauty, I am sure she does: that man plagues her to death with his humours. I saw how it would be from the first. I never liked him—a high and mighty Don, with a pedigree as long as this room! quite unfit for her, coming

out of a country parsonage. But what could I do? Girls are so headstrong—she would have him. He was more than six foot high, forsooth! and what they pretend to call handsome. I hate your giants, for my part. I warned the mother; though, between ourselves, I always thought her a poor weak kind of woman, not at all fit to rule a family. 'My dear Mrs. Rashleigh,' said I—I remember it as well as if it was yesterday—'if Maria marries that man, take my word for it she makes herself wretched! Sooner or later he'll show himself in his true colours, an ill-tempered, arrogant fellow, that will make her the slave of his whims.' And so it has come to pass. She pines away, poor soul! till, upon my word, last time I saw her I could very well have taken her for five and thirty!"

"That at least is no proof of her husband's unkindness," answered Catherine; "when people come so near that age the difference is not very discernible."

"You don't mean to say that!" said Miss Langley, recoiling as though Time himself, with his awful insignia, hour-glass, scythe, and all,

had suddenly risen before her. "You can't mean to tell me that Maria is near five and thirty!"

"Distant not three years. I cannot easily forget her age: there are but two months between us."

"Good gracious! is it so? Dear, dear, how time is running away with us all! What a dismal thing it is to think of it!"

"Let us talk of the young, then, to revive our spirits," said Catherine. "Your godson, my little friend Langley—he must be a very fine boy, if he is what he promised to be when I saw him."

"Yes; he's handsome, tall, and fair—altogether what people in general admire very much. But he disappoints me—too much of the father in him for my taste. And then he so worships the man, he won't hear a word against him!"

"Children should never hear their parents blamed."

"That's all very fine talking, Miss Mansfield, and comes very well from a governess—I beg pardon! I don't wish to be rude; but it's not so easy, let me tell you, to sit by and see a man bringing his family to beggary and not speak

your mind now and then. I'm sure, before he sold Holme Cliffe——"

"Sold it!" exclaimed Catherine, with lively concern.

"Why, didn't she tell you that? That was before they went abroad. Yes; he sold that pretty place that he was so fond of, and all belonging to it. It's hard upon the boy, certainly, and I'm sorry for Maria; but as for the father, I don't pity him in the least! He may thank himself for his ruin. Never was such madness known. Because he had lost one election, he must needs stand a second and a third. It's all the result of his monstrous pride!"

Catherine was much affected by this unexpected intelligence. Miss Langley, long familiar with it, presently resumed, "It's a sad business, no doubt; but it's done, and can't be mended. Well, now, I do wish I had brought little Lisle along with me! Do you happen to know who that tall, broad-shouldered man is—there—just come in?"—pointing to a group of gentlemen who were talking at the farther end of the room.

"His name is Donnelly, Captain Donnelly,

I believe," answered Catherine, lowering her voice.

"A disagreeable countenance! And who, I wonder, is that sheepish-looking youth beside him?"

"Mr. Forrester, the owner of that pretty place to the west of the town," said Catherine, still in a subdued tone, which, however, was quite ineffectual in the way of example.

"I know that one well enough," pursued Miss Langley: "that's Lord Henry Beauchamp. There's a sort of rivalry between us about horses. His are fine animals, I grant; but I don't think they equal mine. I reckon myself, for a lady, a very fair judge: what do you say to it?"

"Nothing. It is no question to refer to me; I have no pretensions to judgment in such matters."

"I've a notion," resumed Miss Langley, "that mine are the higher-priced. Young men pride themselves on knowing all about it; but, after all, it's money that carries the day in that and every thing else."

Catherine was a mortified auditor of these remarks; for certain gestures which she observed

among the gentlemen made her apprehensive that they had been, in part at least, overheard. In fact, it happened that Miss Langley and her money were at this moment the subject of debate. The business which had called the party together was a raffle for the disposal of a picture belonging to a gentleman in the neighbourhood, ruined by extravagant habits. Application for subscription had been already made to this wealthiest of the temporary residents, but as yet no answer had been vouchsafed. Should advantage be taken of the opportunity for personal solicitation? was now the question. Several deemed it unadvisable, professing themselves satisfied by the lady's physiognomy that she was neither of a giving nor a gambling turn. The majority inclined to make the trial, and cheered on Captain Donnelly to the enterprise; but without success. Since a military leader was not to be obtained, on whom should this service devolve? Lord Henry readily volunteered. To him it seemed to promise something like diversion in recompense of the trouble. His companions watched his proceedings with eager curiosity. With an air of profound deference

he craved permission to add Miss Langley's distinguished name to the list in his hand. She smiled graciously on his flattering address.

"My Lord," she answered, "perhaps you are not aware that this matter is not new to me. I had the proposals three days ago."

"Certainly, madam; it was our first object to obtain the concurrence of so generous a patroness of art."

"As to that, my Lord, I make no great pretensions. If patronizing art means buying pictures, I can't take much credit to myself on that score. They don't happen to be things I fancy. My father made a fine collection; but I have not much added to it. I don't think I have bought half a dozen in my life."

Not discouraged by having at the onset shot rather wide of the mark, Lord Henry immediately rejoined that general habits of liberality authorized his friends to hope for her approval.

"Why, as to willingness to spend money, my Lord, there, I do believe, nobody can complain of me. I think it the duty of those who have it to spread it abroad pretty freely."

"Most assuredly," was the gravely respectful reply.

"But then," she resumed, "I like to lay it out on things which please my own taste. And besides, in this case I happen to have a serious objection. The owner of this picture, they tell me, is a spendthrift. It's a bad thing to encourage extravagance: what do you say to that, my Lord?" looking at him most significantly.

"An excellent general principle," he replied, with perfect command of countenance; "but I am not at liberty to enter so deeply into the merits of the case. Since our scheme is not so fortunate as to meet your approbation, we must look in another direction."

"Stay, my Lord! no need to be in such a hurry. I did not positively say 'No' either. I make it a rule in general, as they say, to do at Rome as the Romans do. Let me look at the list. Nothing I like less than a landscape; but the names are what I want. A respectable number: Sir Aubrey Vere at the head—the county Member, isn't he?"

"He is;" and Lord Henry added, amused at

her evident ignorance of his rival's parliamentary distinction, "a man of some consideration here."

"Ah, I suppose so! Takes the lead—three shares: that's handsome. Well, whatever is to be done should be done properly: my name may be put down for five—or stay, give me pen and ink, and I'll do it myself."

Lord Henry, courteously acknowledging this excessive liberality, returned in triumph to his friends.

"A fine young man indeed!" said Miss Langley, looking after him admiringly. "Too lavish, I hear: that's the worst of it. Really, though, he's cajoled me into a pretty morning's work! Fifty guineas for the chance of getting an old piece of canvas with half the varnish off, I dare say! However, I don't regret it, taking all in all. Good morning, Miss Mansfield! I shall be happy to see you when you like. My Lady, I suppose, won't object to that."

Strange as it seemed to bystanders, the transaction just recorded led to a really intimate intercourse between Miss Langley and Lord Henry. The fact was that precluded by Lady Donnington's

watchfulness from all but an occasional gaze at the object of his passion, he found time hang rather heavily on his hands. To rid himself of *ennui* he associated a good deal with a set of men equally vacant of occupation, or rather, allowed them to associate with him. But not being desirous of contracting a lasting connexion with any of them, he sought fairly to acquit himself of all obligations while on the spot. It was on this account that he so readily accepted the hospitalities which were pressed upon him. Miss Langley's house was an excellent lounge for the idle and luxurious, and she cordially welcomed whomever he chose to bring.

There Catherine several times met him. Her own attraction had been the faint hope that tidings might some day come of her long-absent friend, but she found in himself an object of anxious interest. Emma Vere loved him; he might be at length her husband; she could not, therefore, but desire to study his character. She was soon convinced that he possessed more than a mere outward charm of manner: there were indications of many amiable dispositions. It was

not surprising that he had won the favour of his hostess: his demeanour towards women of whatever age or rank was remarkably agreeable. To herself, no doubt because he knew her to be dear to Lady Emma, it was not only courteous, but cordial.

But she was far less pleased with the rest of the society gathered around Miss Langley. Mr. Forrester was the only exception to a certain discreditable tone among the gentlemen; and Miss Lisle was yet the more disagreeable from her uncomfortable consciousness that Catherine knew her thoroughly, and could, if so disposed, tell that of her past conduct which might do her present harm. In the youthful Lucy Clare only was there nothing to disapprove: open and generous in every thought, she offered a delightful contrast to the selfish and artful being beside her.

Lady Emma was deeply interested in Catherine's visits to Miss Langley. Who can imprison love's eyes and ears? Notwithstanding the Marchioness's close observation, she knew perfectly well with whom Lord Henry consorted, and pondered anxiously on the subject.

"Dear Miss Mansfield," said she, "I am grieved to see him so much with those men. I am sure they are not worthy to be his associates."

"I am sorry to be obliged to agree with you. What I see of them does not impress me at all favourably."

"If I might see him once—but once—to entreat him to break off the whole connexion! But as I cannot, could not you?"

"No, dear Emma. I do not scruple to repeat indifferent discourse, but you know I could not carry any thing like a message."

"True," she answered, with a sigh; "I see you could not. But if he could but understand my wishes! It grieves me particularly, knowing as I do what led him hither. When I think of that, and feel it impossible to say a word, I almost wish I had never come here at all!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANWHILE Lord Henry, chafing more each day at the frustration of the hope which had brought him to this spot, devised a plan which might procure him at least one day's felicity. It was that of giving, in concert with his bachelor friends, a *fête champêtre* on an extensive scale. He intimated to Catherine very distinctly his personal object in the project; and though she would not repeat his words to Lady Emma, the latter instantly understood it.

"Oh, delightful!" she exclaimed: "for once, then, at least!"

But in the next instant her exultation vanished, and she added, despondingly, "No; it is in vain; I shall not be there. Lady Donnington would sooner spend a morning in a gaol!"

"It is not, indeed, a scheme which could ever have been congenial to her taste, far less now."

"Ah, you do well to remind me of that!" said Lady Emma. "I ought not to have wished it. I am but indulging an enlarged kind of selfishness. But don't you think it is tantalizing?"

The Marchioness entered at that moment, with a card of invitation in her hand. Lady Emma was obliged to look down on her work very intently.

"Look, Miss Mansfield," said Lady Donnington; "this has just arrived. An invitation to a *déjeuné*, as they call it; a term which simply implies the waste of an entire day!"

So saying, with a slight elevation of the eyebrow, she laid it aside, as a thing which merited not a second thought. Lady Emma's lip quivered, but she could hardly be said to be disappointed. When next alone with Catherine she said eagerly, "I think I see my way, notwithstanding: Lady Margaret will perhaps be my convoy. We are going to Lillesmere to-morrow, you know. I can but ask her: she is always very kind."

This visit had been an affair arranged and postponed several times. The Marchioness could

not altogether decline it, knowing how ardently her husband desired that the cords of relationship should be drawn as tightly as possible; but her personal repugnance was invincible. Lady Margaret, in the hope of rendering it not wholly distasteful to her, had fixed that day for the examination of a school conducted under her care; but even this sober manner of entertaining her guest could not effect its purpose.

"I cannot go, Miss Mansfield," said the Marchioness, when the time at length came. "I must send an excuse; but as I do not wish to give offence, I shall send Lady Emma with you."

They went accordingly; and were welcomed, the one with all kindness, the other with warm affection. But Lady Emma's thoughts were absorbed in one object. Lillesmere was a grand old mansion, rich in fine paintings and valuable antiquities; but to her eyes it contained nothing so deserving of notice as a small piece of pasteboard lying on Lady Margaret's work-table. A better introduction to the request she came prepared to make could not be desired, but she could not use it; her heart beat too

much at the very thought. She ought to speak as if it were not a great point of interest to her, and how could she?

Sir Aubrey soon entered, accompanied by his friend Mr. Middleton. His manner of greeting his cousin betrayed nothing to any other, but to herself it was painfully significant. Their eyes had never met since his had conveyed so keen though undeserved a reproach, and she read in them at once that his resentment was unabated. He had, in fact, been extremely averse to the invitation his mother had given; but without betraying the truth to her he could say nothing against it. After a few minutes of constrained discourse, he desisted from the attempt; but Mr. Middleton, entering into it with an unembarrassed mind, kept it up with true enjoyment. He had never, in a long life, seen any one who in a first interview charmed him so much as this fair kinswoman of his dear pupil. An animated disputation arose between them on the subject of the intended school examination. She, in playful opposition, professed some doubts as to the benefits of the

modern system of education, which he exerted himself with energy to dispel. In the mean time Sir Aubrey, after a few desultory remarks addressed to Catherine and his mother, was about to withdraw, when the latter detained him in reference to the card beside her. There had evidently been some previous discussion on the subject.

"Do let us settle this question at once," said she.

He took up the card, looked at it with an expression of supreme contempt, and threw it again on the table, as his only answer.

"I have not the least inclination for it," said his mother; nevertheless I think we ought to be there."

"Just as you please," he replied, chiefly anxious at the moment to escape.

"You will join us at the school?" said Lady Margaret.

"No, I cannot: I depend on your report," he answered, and then abruptly quitted the room.

This brief parley entirely withdrew Lady Emma's attention from Mr. Middleton's conversation. At the moment it began he was in the middle of a

little history illustrative of his doctrines which had come within his own knowledge, and he was naturally mortified to behold the liveliness of willing interest disappear from her eyes, though they still rested full upon him. Recovering from her abstraction as Sir Aubrey quitted the room, she felt painfully conscious that the case did not admit of apology. The awkward silence which ensued was broken, to their mutual relief, by the entrance of two gentlemen who wished to be present at the intended examination; and the whole party accordingly proceeded together to a pretty school-house within the domain.

Nothing could be more satisfactory than the progress of the young pupils, especially to Mr. Middleton in particular, as rector of the parish. Seeing reason to hope for benefits extending beyond their mortal being, he walked from the school-house in silent, happy reflection. His meditations were agreeably interrupted by Lady Emma, who in reference to their former discussion assured him that she was now "completely converted." His heart and face glowed at her pleasing accents, and he again became eloquent on his favourite

theme. But he passed, by a not unnatural transition, to a warm eulogium on Sir Aubrey, as one who had entered on a career of duty at an age when those of his rank are too often immersed in frivolous dissipation. This remark had somehow the effect of again terminating his conversation with Lady Emma: she paused as if to admire the view, and then joined Lady Margaret and the other gentlemen. Quite unaware of having said any thing which could possibly jar upon her feelings, he then launched forth in her praise.

"Miss Mansfield," he concluded, "as you and I have an interest in common on the subject, will you pardon me for asking if the agreeable report now current respecting her is well founded?"

Catherine absolutely started; for, having Lady Emma's unavowed attachment always in her mind, it seemed to her at the moment as if this were the rumour to which Mr. Middleton alluded.

"Excuse me," he said, "if I have presumed too far. In no other case should I be so inquisitive; but I have so warm an interest in Sir Aubrey's happiness that I am impatient to be assured on the point."

Catherine, now understanding his meaning, thought it best to speak explicitly.

"I never till now heard of such a report," said she; "but since it is in circulation, I must in justice to all parties beg you to contradict it."

"You impose a painful task upon me, Miss Mansfield," he replied, with an expression of serious disappointment. "The illusion you have destroyed was to me most pleasing; they seemed in all respects so admirably suited to each other."

Sir Aubrey joined his guests but just before dinner; and it might be surmised that the business which had occupied him was of no very agreeable character, for he did not sustain his part as host with his usual frank cordiality. He said very little, and his manner at table was quite unlike what might have been expected under the circumstances. Instead of devoting his attention especially to Lady Emma, placed on his right hand, she of all the company was the one whom he seemed least to regard: he really appeared more inclined to turn away from her. Good Mr. Middleton, ignorant of the more subtle symptoms of the

tender passion, noticed his demeanour with much surprise, and silently concluded that, incomprehensible as it was, his quondam pupil must certainly entertain a positive dislike to his charming cousin.

Lady Margaret, perceiving that her son was labouring under some unusual depression of spirits, exerted herself the more to supply his deficiencies, in which endeavour she was well seconded by the invited neighbours, who were both ready in conversation. Passing carelessly from one local topic to another, they came very naturally upon the extraordinary parade of equipage which distinguished Miss Langley above all other sojourners.

"What a prodigious intimacy has sprung up between this illustrious personage and the Duke of Delaval's brother, of all persons in the world!"

"Yes, indeed," rejoined the other gentleman; "it is rather surprising to see the pride of the Beauchamps abased to the worship of this gilded idol."

"Lord Henry has fallen altogether into a second-rate sort of society here," resumed the former speaker: "he will not profit much in any way, I suspect, by keeping the company he does."

"I trouble myself very little on that score," answered his friend: "that is his own affair. But I am really grieved to see Forrester so much with him. Inexperienced as that young man is, he will fall an easy prey. I hear he has already lost considerably: by the end of the season he will probably find himself completely fleeced."

At this part of the discourse Catherine's eyes turned involuntarily on Lady Emma. Her feelings might escape the notice of strangers, but one who knew her countenance could plainly discern that she was much agitated.

The first speaker was less severe in judgment than the last. "Your expressions are rather strong," said he: "we must not let friendly sympathy carry us too far. I am truly sorry for poor Forrester; but I do not suppose he has been unfairly used. No doubt he has bought his experience dear; but that must always happen in such a case. It is the inevitable consequence of the inequality of the match."

"But would any honourable man take part in an unequal contest?" interposed Lady Margaret. "It is a mockery, however, to speak of honour

in reference to the practice of gaming. No man of upright character can be tainted with it."

"Your Ladyship must pardon me," replied the gentleman she addressed: "I confess I am hardly prepared to go that length. I am no apologist for the pursuit: it is most pernicious, I grant; but still there are wide distinctions among those addicted to it. I should hesitate, for instance, to brand Lord Henry with the imputation of dishonourable conduct."

During the progress of this dialogue Sir Aubrey experienced several alternations of feeling. At first, it must be owned, he found it more palatable than any thing which had passed during dinner. He was conscious of something nearly akin to exultation in hearing his successful rival so severely condemned in the presence of her for whose favour they had contended. But this sentiment yielded to one more congenial to a generous nature when he perceived how intensely she was suffering. For his own sake he had reason to repent the furtive glance he directed towards her; for hardly at the one moment when he had indulged in delusive hope had

she appeared to him more captivating than in this, when it was too certain her fondest interest was fixed on another. Silent and motionless as she was, he could discern at once her anguish at hearing such accusations, and her dread lest any one should detect that she was so affected. Involuntarily she bent down her head to shun notice as much as possible, yet she evidently knew that he observed her. This consciousness was evinced by the slightest imaginable movement, indicative of aggravated distress: his gaze was at once withdrawn, yet not without an effort. The conversation meanwhile still followed the course it had taken. Lord Henry's whole character was discussed, and certainly not in the most indulgent spirit. The gentleman who had attacked him so warmly, after mentioning several circumstances not highly to his credit, at length observed, "But that which above all disgraces him, which alone in my opinion would stamp his name with infamy, is his conduct to that unhappy man, his servant."

This allusion awakened the eager curiosity of his hearers.

"What was that? what do you mean?" was the general inquiry.

"You never heard of that?" he rejoined, with a little of the self-complacency not uncommon in one who finds himself able to regale the company with an entirely fresh piece of scandal: "why, it was the talk of the town!"

Nevertheless it had not travelled into that neighbourhood it seemed; for all professed entire ignorance, except Lady Margaret, and her recollections were confused and imperfect. Mr. Jervase accordingly proceeded to give a succinct account:—"Why, after acting most shamefully—after corrupting the man's integrity by his own bad example, and paying him hardly a shilling of his just due, what does he, when the poor wretch, over head and ears in debt, is tempted to forgery, but turn upon him, and become his prosecutor!"

"Is that possible?" exclaimed Mr. Middleton.

No; it was not possible; it was not true!

Indignant at so grievous a slander, affected by the liveliest remembrance of her lover's deep concern for his unhappy domestic, Lady Emma

was actually on the point of speech. But it was the impulse of a second only: she drew back, as she had started forward, unnoticed by any but Sir Aubrey, and, agonized by the consciousness that she could not do that which it was intolerable to her to leave undone, involuntarily looked up to him! He understood the mute appeal; indeed his own sense of honour had already admonished him not to allow his rival's name to be so unjustly aspersed. But the vehement dislike he entertained for him whom he was called upon, in this one instance, to justify, combined with the awkwardness arising from the unseasonable fit of gloom to which he had given way, unfitted him for the task he undertook. His voice was husky, his manner exceedingly abrupt.

"You are mistaken there, Jervase," he said; "that is not the right account of the matter. Lord Henry had nothing to do with the trial; it was the Duke: the Duke was the prosecutor."

He had made the effort; he had said enough for justice, rather too much for courtesy. The effect of his suddenly breaking into the conversation for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of

flatly contradicting one of his guests, could not be happy. Mr. Jervase looked as if he hardly knew how to take it; Lady Margaret, as if she did not know where to look.

"If I am wrong," the former coldly replied, "I can safely say I gave the tale as I heard it: my informant is answerable for its inaccuracies."

Sir Aubrey, unconscious of the disagreeable surprise his interruption had excited, relapsed into his moody silence. Much as he despised his rival, he could almost have desired to exchange positions with him. That sigh of sad but tender regret his attentive ear distinguished, might it not have overpaid a world's opprobrium, if breathed for his own sake? The pangs of envy rendered him absolutely morose.

"Nothing will ever dispel this infatuation," he said within himself. "Were he even more undeserving she would love him still! But what is it to me? Why waste more thought upon her?"

Again he turned to look on her with proud indifference—again to be subdued completely. He found it impossible to behold her without sympathy. Manly generosity regained possession

of his soul, and restored it at once to tranquillity. One of the privileges of favoured love, not the least precious, might then be his. For once he might afford protection to her who would accept no other token of his devotion. In a most painful and embarrassing position she might owe to him her preservation from the humiliation of general remark. Prompted by this chivalrous motive, he bent forwards so as effectually to screen her from the view of the rest of the company. The movement at first surprised and pained her; but in another instant, perceiving his intention, she repaid him with a look touchingly expressive of gratitude. It almost disqualified him from the service he wished to render her; but forcibly abstracting his mind from all personal feeling, he attempted to engage her in separate discourse. She understood his design, and endeavoured to answer; but the power of speech was gone; an hysterical affection she could hardly in any degree restrain forbade the utterance of a single syllable. He placed a glass of water beside her; but as she extended her trembling hand her agitation was augmented. The more moderate

of Lord Henry's censors, as if to soften the inveteracy of Mr. Jervase, touched lightly on his agreeable endowments.

"It is well for you," said he, laughingly, "that there are not many ladies present; you would otherwise incur the risk of a sharp onset from some fair champion."

"For the honour of the sex I would hope not," answered Mr. Jervase, warmly; "known as he is as the most fickle of ours."

The glass Lady Emma was just raising to her lips would have fallen from her hand but for the ready aid of Sir Aubrey. He could do no more than exchange a quick glance with his mother. Her Ladyship, on rising, was followed with glad alacrity by one of her female guests, but with extreme difficulty by the other. With faltering steps and dizzy sight Lady Emma reached a couch on which she might sink down in utter wretchedness. Hardly one of the allegations she had heard was entirely new to her; but how different an aspect had they borne when viewed through the softening medium of affection! Were those who had descanted upon them mercilessly

severe, or was it rather that she herself had been far too lenient in judgment? Neither time nor place, however, allowed deep consideration of that question; she had to preserve appearances, to conceal her sufferings. Finding it impossible to do this entirely, she confessed blushingly, yet not untruly, to a severe headache. Lady Margaret could not then do otherwise than offer some assistance: she bathed the throbbing temples with eau-de-Cologne, yet not at first with cordial pity; for the cause which had produced it was to her a subject of grave displeasure. She had always hitherto discredited the rumours of an attachment so derogatory to her young kinswoman; but it was impossible to doubt now. She was touched soon, however, with gentler feelings. Her patient's eyes were fast closed, but tears glistened on the lids, and the whole countenance revealed a sorrow very deep, but very meek. Her actions became insensibly expressive of her softened tone of mind: she pressed the hands so chillingly cold with an almost maternal tenderness. It called forth the relief most needed—a flow of tears. Then, with delicate

consideration, she discontinued her kind offices, and bestowed her attention exclusively upon Catherine. Lady Emma, thus left to herself, regained enough of composure to see the entrance of the gentlemen without alarm. But she could still think only of the late conversation. More than ever did she long to be present at the approaching *fête*. Nothing, she felt, could effectually dispel her griefs and alarms but her lover's vindication, coming from his own lips: him she could and would believe against all the world. Emboldened by despair, she said in a low whisper, when in the act of taking leave, "Dear Lady Margaret, I have a favour to ask you."

"What is it, my dear?" asked her Ladyship, disposed to listen with peculiar indulgence.

"It is nothing of any consequence," answered Lady Emma, blaming herself for having introduced the subject with too much earnestness. "I meant only that should you be present at the *fête* next week, I shall be happy if I may accompany you. I have no other chance of going," she added, in a hurried tone, "for Lady Donnington positively declines."

The request was unexpected and unwelcome. It was one thing to pity misplaced affection as a source of grief, another to endure with patience the beholding it inspire hope and joy. Lady Margaret's reply was brief and cold: "I am not at all sure that I shall go: it depends on my son's engagements."

Lady Emma forgot her own wishes as she heard this reply. Lively gratitude to the one admirer divided her heart with anxious solicitude for the other.

"Sir Aubrey!" she exclaimed; "oh, I would not on any account he should be troubled about it! Pray do not think of me: it is of no consequence at all."

But Lady Margaret had relented even while she spoke, and, with a decent semblance of reconsideration, declared she had pretty nearly made up her mind to be there. "And if I am," she added, "I shall certainly request Lady Donnington to allow me the pleasure of your company."

With this kindly promise for her comfort Lady Emma departed. The visit had been most trying, most painful, but it had not been in vain: she

soothed her recollections with the hope before her. But she left her entertainers, mother and son, in much disturbance of mind. The former grieved at once that she loved Lord Henry and that Sir Aubrey did not, as she concluded, love her; while he, on the contrary, was suffering keenly from the strong revival of a passion his previous efforts had but half extinguished.

CHAPTER XV.

ALL Leamington was now in excitement at the prospect of this out-door party, for which an excellent site had been chosen. The owner of the painting just disposed of by raffle seemed to have brought himself to penury expressly that his forsaken dwelling might afford the requisite accommodation. The donors of the *fête* neglected nothing on their part: the principal rooms were thrown open, and temporarily furnished, the extensive grounds hastily put into some degree of order, the general air of desolation sufficiently removed for a single day's entertainment. But in what should that entertainment consist? What means of gratification could be provided for a company of critically-refined habits during so

many hours? The associated inviters found this question not a little perplexing—the unfailing resource of the present time, the excitement of croquet, being as yet unknown. Some one suggested an attempt to impart local interest to the course of diversions. A bronze figure of Warwickshire's glory stood conspicuously on the lawn: would it be possible to exhibit on that spot some tolerable resemblance to the antique exercise of morris-dancing, commemorated by his passing notice? The proposal was soon negatived. Nothing, it was agreed, would more certainly provoke ridicule than a clumsy endeavour to revive a bygone sport; let them be rational, at all events. And so it came at last to little more than the familiar method of whiling away time: walking up and down a smooth space of ground to the measure of pretty airs.

But the weather, the point above all important on such occasions, proved highly propitious—bright and warm, though September was far advanced: and people in general came resolved to be pleased. The scheme had been planned expressly for Lady Emma's sake, and yet her

being present was almost to the last extremely doubtful. Lady Margaret, faithful to her word, pleaded earnestly with the Marchioness; but the latter's consent was not easy to obtain, for she had penetration enough to discern that Lord Henry was the prime-mover of the whole. On the other hand, she also knew it to be her lord's desire that his granddaughter should be as much as possible with her relations, and she had here an opportunity of complying with his wishes without burdening herself with their society. She yielded, therefore, at length an ungracious assent to Lady Margaret's petition.

Sir Aubrey went most unwillingly, solely to avoid betraying his unhappy position to his mother: his dissatisfaction betrayed itself in every look and tone. Lord Henry saw, heard, and understood all with secret triumph. He received the party from Lillesmere with particular respect, exulting in the consciousness that the keen sight of jealousy would detect in his reception of Lady Emma something slightly different from that of her other hosts. But if this enjoyment were somewhat ungenerous, it was but short.

Lady Emma, alarmed on her own account, grieved on that of Sir Aubrey, hastened to resign him to the throngs of ladies of all ages and conditions by whom he above all his coadjutors was eagerly beset.

A weight hung upon the Lillesmere party, which was yet further augmented by the intrusion of a tiresome companion, a Miss Ufford, one of the sisters Lady Emma had met at her Aunt Coningsby's, who thought it convenient to join them, and could by no polite hints be driven off. In vain did Sir Aubrey quit the verdant and spacious promenade to strike into a narrow shrubbery which had been left uncleared of moss and fallen leaves; she persisted in accompanying them still.

"You don't seem to be pleased, Sir Aubrey —I wonder why? For my part, I think every thing delightful! Lord Henry has so much taste! I mention him particularly because, you know, every body considers it to be more his party than any one else's. I am so glad he came down here! But I wonder why he did? it must have been quite a sudden thought; every body said he was going abroad!"

None of her auditors attempting any reply to these remarks, she soon resumed on another topic: "What a strange woman that Miss Langley is! so over-dressed! What can make Lord Henry so fond of her company? Some say he goes merely to laugh at her, and it's not at all unlikely. However, if he does, he is careful not to let her see it: she thinks he likes her very much. This I know positively, for Major Dickenson himself said so to a lady who repeated it to a particular friend of ours. Well, only think, just as we are talking of them here they both come to meet us! It really seems as if they were inseparable."

The junction which was matter of amusement to her was far otherwise to the Veres. On the part of one of those approaching it was not undesigned. Miss Langley had kept beside Lord Henry with the secret purpose of obliging him to introduce her to some of the more distinguished families. Hitherto he had managed so adroitly as to avoid compliance without actually offending her, excusing himself sometimes on the plea of not being sufficiently acquainted with the parties,

and more than once affecting not to hear the request. But he was less fortunate now: she had observed this party enter the shrubbery, and inveigled him to accompany her to the point where it terminated. Her professed object was to inspect a summer-house planted on an artificial eminence; but when within a few paces of the group she boldly avowed her real design.

"Come, now, my Lord," said she, triumphantly, "you're fairly in for it at last! No more excuses, if you please! Here come some friends of yours, and here"—taking a very forcible grasp of his arm—"here am I; so now be good enough to make us acquainted at once."

Not a little provoked at finding himself thus trepanned, Lord Henry saw that he was, in the Lady's phraseology, "fairly in for it," and could no longer elude her demand without coming to a positive rupture. The result of the step was what he anticipated. Lady Margaret was evidently displeased, and Sir Aubrey's smouldering wrath was inflamed to an almost suffocating degree. But Miss Langley being on her side perfectly at ease took upon herself, in Court style, to present as

soon as she had been herself presented. Miss Clare and Miss Lisle, her ordinary retinue, both came in for the honour of an introduction to Lady Margaret: a circumstance as painful to the native delicacy of the one as flattering to the mean vanity of the other. In the mean time Lord Henry had vanished: a desertion which called forth the vehement complaints of Miss Langley.

"Gone!" she cried, "actually gone! leaving me here in the lurch! Well, upon my word, that's not his Lordship's best behaviour! I wonder how I am to toil up that ugly little hillock without his help?"

Miss Lisle assiduously proffered the service of her arm, but it was very unceremoniously declined.

"No, thank you, Lisle: you're very obliging; but, I know you'll excuse my saying so, you're just three inches too short for the purpose."

Miss Lisle, who happened to have a peculiar dislike to being reminded of her diminutive stature, smiled nevertheless most complacently on the great lady's pleasant humour.

"Come here, Lucy, my dear!" resumed Miss Langley; "you're but a slender staff; but for

want of a firmer I suppose I must be content to rest on you."

Miss Clare advanced accordingly; but Sir Aubrey, impatient as he was to be free of such companionship, could not see a delicately framed girl undertake so Herculean a labour. He offered his own aid, which was most willingly accepted. Lady Margaret would have walked on, had not Miss Ufford acknowledged the having rather a fancy to look about her. The leader of the party threw the burden of ascending so very much on her supporter as to satisfy him that it would have been a cruel task indeed for one of the weaker sex.

"Good gracious, what a crooked path this is! Slippery too, to make matters worse! Heaven help us! if my footing chance to fail we shall all roll down together! Let me stop to breathe. Well, another hoist, and it's done! Here we are at last! and here I must stay all my days, I do think, if going down were at all like coming up!—Where are you hurrying so fast? Oh, to help the others! well, that's right enough."

The latter labour was much more speedily

accomplished. It took considerably less time to render such assistance to four ladies of moderate proportions and corresponding agility, than to one of the prodigious magnitude resulting from long habits of luxurious indulgence.

But no sooner had they all attained the level on which the summer-house was planted than Miss Langley, with intolerable freedom, again took possession of the arm whose aid she now no longer needed.

"So, Sir Aubrey," said she, "we're in the same boat, I find—losers both in that foolish raffle affair! You came off best, however; your shares were but three, mine five. I cared little about getting it, however. There are always plenty of pictures to be had; and, really, for aught I see one's pretty well as good as another. To tell you the truth, if it had not been for your friend, my Lord there, I don't think I should have put in at all. He, with his fine speeches, really cajoled me into it!"

Sir Aubrey received this information in absolute silence. The name of "friend" applied to one whom it required, he felt, so strong an effort not to hate, was too much for his already over-tried

powers of endurance. Repelled by the son, Miss Langley endeavoured to enter into familiar discourse with the mother; but with no better success. Lady Margaret could not but regard her with increasing aversion. The bad taste she had betrayed in forcing herself on their acquaintance was equally apparent in every thing she said with a view to improving it. Her manner in regard to Miss Clare was especially offensive to one whose own feelings of kindness were not less refined than sincere. Poor Lucy had to hear her whole history imparted to the noble stranger in a loud whisper; nor did her evident annoyance at all check the flow of narration. But Lady Margaret was careful not to inflict further injury on her susceptibility. She appeared not to understand the palpable hints thrown out to her, saying only very courteously that she gave no entertainments suited to the taste of young people. Miss Langley nodded intelligence.

"Ah, I understand! not having daughters: that's the general rule, though it has never been mine. I keep open house for boys and girls. It's my way. I like the young; and I believe I

may say the young like me—eh, Lucy, my dear?"

All this was acutely painful to Lady Emma; for as having been introduced by Lord Henry, Miss Langley's defects reflected discredit upon him. Yet all previous disquiet was forgotten when he came, his eyes bright with gladness, to lead her to the dance. When the company was fully mustered, it had been agreed by common consent that to this primitive diversion recourse must be had. It might be rather too early, a little out of the usual course of things, but there was really no other method of disposing of the hour before twilight, at which the party was to break up. Lord Henry, this point settled, acted with admirable discretion: to avoid all danger of suspicion he asked for partners, in the first place, three ladies of high local distinction, thus leaving himself free to enjoy afterwards that for which he had thought and planned. And fully did her joy answer to his. Where now were all the grievous errors laid to his charge, over which but a few days before she had so bitterly wept? No more in her mind than his own; altogether forgotten

in the delight of being once more with him. The dance concluded, they did not part: he had selected a happy spot, just sufficiently in and out of the way to afford them a fair chance of being undisturbed, without provoking censorious remark if any one else should chance to wander thither. When there, his language became at length as unequivocal as his manner, when none else was present, had always been. He spoke fervently and truly. Few lovers could have used less exaggeration in protesting that there existed not another woman upon earth who could have kindled in his heart so inextinguishable a passion. She listened in speechless agitation: once, twice her lips moved, but no articulate sound issued from them. He well understood her, but he feigned incertitude, almost despondency, till he won a single glance, expressive simply of surprise that words were needed. Then, supplicating no longer, he lavished upon her the fondest epithets permitted to the accepted lover. But before their mutual bliss had received its inevitable check, the recollection of Lord Donnington's steadfast disapprobation, a ruder interruption occurred.

The place where they sat together, a bank of turf, was encompassed on all sides by shrubs, which from long want of the gardener's shears had become so wildly luxuriant as to prevent their being aware of any one's approach. Holding apart two overgrown laurels between which she had pushed her way, Miss Langley stood before them with a certain good-humoured, yet most annoying expression of countenance.

"Well, my Lord," said she, "you have indeed hidden yourself cleverly! You play a fine game at hide and seek. Such a hunt as you have given me!"

Exceedingly irritated on his own account, Lord Henry was actually alarmed on Lady Emma's; and to guard her as much as possible from observation, fixed his eyes full on the speaker's visage while he answered her jocose reproaches.

"Have I been wanted? I am sorry; but, really, there are others——"

"Ay, ay, to be sure!" she replied; "and well for me that there are. I might have broken my limbs or my neck, for aught you knew or cared! You left me to scramble up that little steep bit

of ground, you know, just as I could. If it had not been for Sir Aubrey's help, I never should have got up at all!"

"Pardon me, I really did not know that you meant to attempt it."

"The plain English of it is, my Lord"—fixing her eyes with audacious freedom on the daughter of the Veres—"where there's a will there's a way! But I didn't come to grumble about that little affair; it's over and done with. My business is only just to put you in mind of something I've a notion you're not unlikely to forget. Mind to ask Lucy Clare, as you promised me. It's not that she's not sure enough of partners—no fear whatever of that; but I choose that she shall stand up once with you; I make a point of it."

"Certainly, if the lady will so honour me," he replied, biting his lip in the effort to conceal his disgust and impatience.

"Very well," she rejoined; "that's quite enough. There's no hurry about the matter, so that it's not forgotten—no hurry at all!" And with a broad smile, not to say a half-nod

of provoking intelligence, she effected her exit as she came.

But not at all as before her coming was the position of those she left. She had cruelly marred their happiness. Lady Emma was utterly discomposed. Such a woman to have penetrated such a secret!

"Do not mind her, dearest," said Lord Henry, soothingly.

"I cannot help it," she replied, blushing more deeply as she became fully conscious of what she had to apprehend. "She will talk, I know she will! Insufferable woman! no one knows what she may say."

Lord Henry was himself quite aware that this was no imaginary danger; but he endeavoured to tranquillize his Emma that he might at least enjoy to the utmost these few privileged moments. With this view he sought a little to moderate the intensity of her aversion to the intruder.

"She should not have come here troubling me—at this moment above all others! In her own house sometimes she is well enough."

"How can you think her endurable? How can you ever go near her?"

"I should be somewhat at a loss now and then, if I did not. Her house is convenient, open at all times without form or ceremony; she makes her guests right welcome, and really is in her way an amusing sort of personage. I am not singular in approving her so far: all my friends will bear the same testimony."

A rapid change of feeling depicted itself on Lady Emma's features.

"Ah, I remember," she said; "I had something to say about those gentlemen. I wish you would shake them all off!"

"Indeed!" he replied, in surprise: "how have they offended you? I was not aware that till this morning any one of them had ever had the honour of addressing you!"

"I have no personal complaint to make; but still, indeed, I do wish most earnestly that you would discard them!"

"But on what ground? Tell me but why; for, in this one instance, my own, I cannot yield unquestioning submission. Society, you know,

has certain laws: it is hardly allowable to associate freely with a man one day and cut him on the next, without having some kind of reason to allege. Give me but some clue—something of an explanation."

Thus urged, Lady Emma was induced to enter on a theme which afforded her auditor exquisite delight. Whenever she essayed to advise or reprove him, he felt as if the entire day would be too short for hearing her; for then, and then only, she lost something of the bashfulness which restrained the expression of her feelings towards him. Solicitude for his amendment absorbed her whole being; the peculiar earnestness of her voice confessed in its full extent the tenderness which at other moments she sought to conceal. To prolong to the utmost those gentle admonitions —more grateful to his soul than the plaudits of all the rest of mankind—he often resorted to stratagem, affecting a strange perversion both of feeling and understanding, that she might in the redoubled anxiety thus awakened unconsciously reveal yet more and more of the strength, and depth, and purity of her affection. But on

this occasion he indulged in this gratification a little too long. Grieved to find him so unmoved, she attempted to fortify her counsel by that of others. Her opinion, she assured him, was not hers alone; persons much wiser than she was were equally persuaded that he acted most imprudently in being so constantly seen with such men. The application of this argument had an effect very contrary to her desire. Censure from any but herself was not more palatable to him than to the sons of Adam in general. The buoyancy of his spirits carried him above an habitual consciousness of not being exactly what the wise would approve, but any specific charge would as easily chafe his temper as any other man's. Lady Emma had therefore committed a serious error, as she presently became aware.

"Those are the doctrines professed at Lillesmere, I presume?" he said, with a peculiar sort of smile which she had never before seen.

Much alarmed at this hasty conjecture, she hastened to reply, "Not there, not there only, but universally—that is, among good and wise people."

"Very possibly," he answered, with the same

air of haughty resentment; "but I must be allowed to be master of my own conduct, let the sages think as they please."

"Do not speak so," she answered, beseechingly. "There is, you know it well, but one straight course for all to follow."

He made no reply, nor did his aspect clear. After a time he demanded to know distinctly what had been advanced against his "friends" (with a marked emphasis) and himself. She now became extremely apprehensive, conscious of the danger of betraying more of the conversation which had passed in her presence than was justifiable or safe, and endeavoured to evade his inquiry. But his offended self-love penetrated into all: he drew from her by direct questioning the principal points of that disparaging discourse. Some of the charges he admitted to be true; others, to her great relief, he positively denied. But at last in her confusion the name of Forrester escaped her lips, and he instantly caught the hint. "What of him? what of Mr. Forrester?" he asked, in a tone at which she actually trembled. In the first distress of hearing that story, she could

imagine no comfort but that of telling it to him, and receiving his assurance that it was unfounded. But she had not long continued in that frame of mind; she soon became aware that such a disclosure might lead to terrible consequences. Earnestly now did she long to recall the name, but it was impossible; nor could she lessen the effect it had produced. Lord Henry's frame of mind had changed totally within the last ten minutes; he was no longer the devoted lover, proud to acknowledge himself the subject of her will; he was simply a man asserting the rightful dominion of his sex.

"What of Mr. Forrester?" he continued to demand, till she was compelled to answer, "Nothing; only they say he has been so unfortunate."

"Unfortunate! and how?"

"In gam——at play," she answered falteringly.

His brow darkened. "Well, what more?"

The colour which previous apprehensions had banished from her cheek suddenly returned. The terrible fear with which she had heard the accusation rushed back upon her heart.

"Is it true?" she asked, looking up in his face with an expression of fondly anxious interest. But he did not see it: in the angry mood which now possessed him his gaze no longer rested on her, but wandered unquietly, now to the skies, now to the ground. He answered at length, not altogether with his previous carelessness of treating the subject, but rather with an effort to assume that manner, "Mr. Forrester may have lost considerably. In plain words, I know he has."

"They say that, but for his mother's jointure, they would be absolutely in distress."

"It is likely enough, I am afraid; but whose fault was it but his own? No one obliged him to play. It was his own voluntary act."

"But he is so young—hardly two and twenty!"

"Be it so: I must be permitted to observe there is nothing peculiar to him in that circumstance. We have all been two and twenty in our turn. It is but three years since I myself stood at the same point in life, and I do not remember having then experienced any indulgence on the score of my tender years. There is no hardship

in his case. A raw, inexperienced player must necessarily lose."

"It was incumbent on those more experienced to take no advantage of his want of skill. Do not defend them; I am shocked at their treatment of this unfortunate young man!"

"I shall regard him more highly in future," said Lord Henry; "he seems capable of inspiring a deep interest. I could willingly take his heaviest loss to be as tenderly pitied."

The words, look, and tone could not but offend Lady Emma. She did not speak: her very silence expressed resentment. The liveliest compunction succeeded to his mood of irritation: he took sudden possession of her hand, pressing it to his lips with a fervour which most eloquently implored forgiveness. The impetuosity of his feelings made him regardless of the danger which terrified her—the intrusion of some other stranger. In vain she endeavoured to withdraw her hand; in vain she attempted remonstrance: her half-uttered words seemed only to augment the passionate contrition he was testifying. Released at length, her first impulse was to quit him in

haste. But to this he objected, very humbly, "Do not leave me! We will go now, if you wish it; but indeed it ought to be together."

She stood irresolute: he again took her hand and kissed it, but with a change of manner, conveying only a sentiment of profound respect. No word was spoken by either as they returned to mingle with the rest of the company; but fortunately they met none to remark the peculiarity of their demeanour. Circumstances favoured their escaping notice: the hour of refection separated parties, the tables having been laid within the house and without that the variety of inclination among so large a number might be amply consulted. Again among his guests, Lord Henry was once more the moving spirit, directing all, attending to all, pleasing every one according to his humour. Dancing resumed, he was the partner of all who could expect he should be, of more than one who looked not so high. But Lady Emma did not so easily regain her equanimity of spirits: like a fluttered dove, she nestled beneath Lady Margaret's protecting wing, declining all invitations on the

plea that "dancing on the grass was so very fatiguing."

No other lady present, however, raised any objection to that species of flooring; on the contrary, a chorus of approval was heard: "nothing could be more delightful! reminded one of the south of France, of Italian shores," &c. Not till it was quite dark did the party break up, even then much disposed to dispute the calendar, and hold the sun to be out of his regular course.

Lady Emma returned home in considerable dread of the Marchioness's inquiries: but they were neither long nor minute. Her Ladyship, thankful that the day's folly was over, was content to trust that her deputy had executed her trust with fidelity, not permitting her charge to be long out of sight. Lady Margaret herself was not perfectly easy as to this, but she did not suspect that Lord Henry could have obtained the lengthened private interview which in point of fact he had.

But Catherine discerned at once that something of deep interest had occurred, Lady Emma's manner was so shy, so abstracted; she said so

little of the company, the entertainment, of any thing that she had heard or seen during the course of the day. Full light was thrown on the subject by the entrance of Barnes, with a very small packet sent "by the gentlemen who gave the party." A faint flush rose to Lady Emma's cheek as she received it, with the words only, "Oh, my bracelet! I dropped it."

Till then she had not observed the loss; but she instantly knew it must have been detached in her efforts to escape from Lord Henry's detention: her bloom deepened at the recollection, still more when she discovered how ingeniously he had availed himself of the act of restitution. The innermost enclosure of the ornament was a small note—the first he had ever conveyed to her hands. These were the words:—

"Loveliest and dearest,—A precious relic accompanies this, one with which I could hardly have endured to part, but that its restoration is my sole means of communication. I cannot remain here and act as you desire; but I can quit the spot; and so I prefer to do, rather than disregard a will dearer than my own. Adieu, then! and

judge by the extent of the sacrifice how absolute is your empire in the heart of H. B."

To fly to the blessed instruments of captive lovers, pen and paper, was Lady Emma's first impulse on reading this effusion. It was checked by Catherine in alarm.

"My dear Emma, what are you about to do?"

"To say he must not leave. What! don't you understand? Oh, no; you cannot! He is going to-morrow. Do not delay me: I must write at once."

"You will not—you must not! Correspondence, you know, is forbidden!"

"It is, I remember. But," Lady Emma added, passionately clasping her hands, "if you knew how hard this is! Not to answer—not a word! And we parted so! I had not spoken since——"

"Since when?" Catherine gently asked.

"Since—I cannot tell you. He had displeased me much. He may think me still offended!"

"It is not likely," Catherine rejoined, with a somewhat mournful smile.

"If I could but be sure he would not! And I spoke so very strongly of his faults: I am afraid I went too far."

"No danger of that," replied Catherine, shaking her head.

"Perhaps, after all," continued Lady Emma, her countenance brightening, "he will not go so *very* soon to-morrow. We are always out early. If I could but just look towards him, I think he would understand."

Upon the faith of this hope she lay down to repose; but the morning proved it to be illusory. Earlier than the earliest invalids came abroad, the news spread throughout Leamington that the hero of yesterday had disappeared. The effect it produced surpasses description. The ladies one and all would have been reduced to absolute despair, but for the consolation of illimitable curiosity. His Lordship's friends became at first persons of some importance, being naturally thought likely to be in possession of authentic information; but it presently appeared they were quite as ignorant as those who questioned them. All then was wild conjecture. The papers were eagerly scanned: had there been sudden family calamity, sickness, death? But no; nothing could be discovered that favoured this explanation of

the mystery. The fugitive's well-known habits guided some people to the suspicion of pecuniary embarrassment; but parliamentary privilege secured his personal liberty: besides, however heavy the burden of debt he had brought to Leamington, he could not have greatly augmented it during his stay. Some suggested a thought of terror: could it be a duel? Impossible! Whom could he have challenged? or who could have taken offence at him, whom all had seen, to the latest moment of his sojourn among them, the most courteous of the donors of that brilliant *fête?* The perplexity was insolvable; but this was certain, whatever might be the cause of his departure, it could not reflect any discredit on the young nobleman. He could have done nothing to forfeit the grateful remembrance of those whom he had so abruptly quitted.

The Marchioness of Donnington, sole exception to her sex, rejoiced most heartily in this unlooked-for event. It left her free to take her daily drive undisturbed by the fear that, if her vigilance slackened for an instant, "that worthless young man" with irrepressible audacity might approach

near enough to exchange with her whom she guarded the prohibited indulgence of a smile. The comparative tranquillity of her mind much assisted the remedies prescribed to her. Unwillingly as she had come to that salubrious spring, she returned thence a healthier, and therefore rather a happier woman.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE to whom alone among the denizens of Leamington Lord Henry's sudden departure was not a mystery, hardly knew whether it affected her more deeply with pain or pleasure. While he was near, it had indeed seemed, as she owned to Catherine, "not at all enough only to see him;" yet when deprived of that solace, that secret point of daily interest, the void was great. But the cause of his going, compliance with her own earnest wish—manifesting, as he himself had said, her absolute dominion over him—and, yet more precious to her disinterested love, the consequence of that step, his freedom from those unworthy associates—here was deep, unfailing consolation.

The remainder of the autumn and the ensuing winter crept on in the solemn dreary grandeur of Donnington. The Marquis abated something of his severity towards his granddaughter: he knew that she had been at Lillesmere, and was inclined to flatter himself that his kinsman might have come to a better understanding with her, and that his favourite object might ultimately be attained. Unsuspicious of its cause, the change in his demeanour was a comfort to Lady Emma; and she needed all she could find, being in a very anxious state of mind. Where now was he on whom her thoughts were so intently fixed? Not only was she denied direct communication, she could hear nothing even from a third party. Miss Dallas was passing the winter in Italy, having availed herself of the knowledge that her mother had died of consumption to alarm her father into that which was otherwise most repugnant to his principles and feelings—absenting himself from his own people at the season when his residence among them was most essential to their comfort. A very slight cough, judiciously managed, had sufficed for this object. But Lady

Emma hardly regretted being cut off from this source of intelligence, distorted as the facts would most assuredly have been by the mischievous invention of the narrator. There was one who was tolerably certain to be furnished with trustworthy news—the Duchess of Ilminster. But her Grace relied especially for the cure of an attachment fostered by her own seeming approval to the benefits of rigorous silence. Her letters therefore were uniformly written on the pattern of that already exhibited: diffuse on every indifferent topic—that on which her niece pined for but a single word was carefully excluded. There remained one other possible chance of tidings—the public journals. Morning after morning did poor Lady Emma wait, with an eagerness she could with difficulty conceal, till her Aunt Arabella should lay aside the sheets she was turning over with such evident marks of utter weariness, not to say disgust. But here also she was doomed to a cruel disappointment. News of this kind she found was not only often inaccurate, but supplied also with capricious uncertainty. Looking down the especial column

devoted to it, she saw therein, as it appeared to her, again and again the name of every scion of nobility, his only excepted which she so longingly sought. Once, but once, did her eager gaze rest upon it, and then, alas! it dispelled a bright illusion. Whilst left wholly to conjecture, she had formed a plausible theory, disposing satisfactorily of the whole period since their separation. Often had she recapitulated to Catherine, ever sympathizing as the latter was, her excellent reasons for believing him to be now with the Duke his brother, or with the best and most sober-minded of his family connexions. The short paragraph before her dissipated the dream. Lord Henry Beauchamp, having just quitted the seat of Sir Thomas Dashford, was about to join the party assembled at Lord Scudamore's. These friends were, indeed, of a class distinct from those she had adjured him to forsake, men of unblemished honour in the world's repute, but not, she had but too much cause to believe, widely different in heart and mind. She wept bitterly over the brief announcement.

But time, in steady progress, brought a wel-

come change. Lord Donnington's habits were invariable: as a peer of the realm he held it to be his indispensable duty to be in town at the meeting of Parliament, though infirm health had long precluded his personal attendance. With heartfelt joy did Lady Emma again find herself in the great metropolis. But its millions still wanted the one important unit; at least she nowhere saw him, and dared not make inquiry. Again her spirits drooped; she became exceedingly restless, averse to all in-door employments, devising all manner of pretexts for going out. One forenoon she told Catherine that she had a fancy to see how the streets looked when "nobody was in them." In this professed object of curiosity she was disappointed; there was not the strange emptiness she had perhaps expected. She saw indeed none of her acquaintance, a few early riders excepted, but yet too many of humankind to be reckoned as "nobody" in her opinion. But the conventional term she had employed was not wholly inapplicable to the fashionable emporium or *magasin*, as it is now usual to designate what our grandmothers were humbly contented to know

as a shop for the sale of wool, silks, and other materials for feminine ornamental works: two customers only were there at that early hour of the day. Between these two, seated just opposite to the place where Lady Emma in her somewhat languid progress came to a halt, there was a remarkable contrast. The rich apparel and costly purchases of the one denoted her to be amply endowed with the gifts of fortune; the other bought little, and from her general appearance it might be inferred that economy was with her no matter of choice. But, in counterpoise, the former was extremely deaf; the latter was in full possession of every bodily faculty; and marked fretfulness in look and tone showed that the infirmity was felt much to outweigh her advantages in the wealthy dame's estimation. Being one not easily satisfied, she at last required some article which even there could not be instantly produced. In the interval which occurred her acquaintance, whose physiognomy beamed with good-nature, attempted to amuse her with discourse. The nature of the case did not permit this to be very privately carried on; her neigh-

bours could not avoid hearing every word that passed.

"Have you heard the morning news? about this extraordinary marriage, I mean."

"No," was the sullen rejoinder: "whose marriage is it?"

There was a momentary pause while the informant collected her full powers of enunciation, to reply, "Lord — Henry — Beauchamp's." A slight rest between title, Christian, and surname made the whole appellation appallingly distinct. How often in this strangely complex mode of existence are we involved at one and the same instant in affairs of the most incongruous description! At this crisis of intense agitation Lady Emma had to decide on the hue of a skein of wool. The ears which actually seemed to thrill with that terrible announcement had to admit the answer to the insignificant inquiry just before made. This was what she had to do; but done it could not be. She cast a piteously appealing look on Catherine, whose senses were instantly at her command, prompt to discriminate concerning the trifling objects with which she ought to

seem occupied, and yet at the same time seize every particular of the intelligence by which she was in reality absorbed. The speaker, somewhat exhausted by her strenuous efforts in articulation, rested a little again before proceeding with her story.

"The wonder is," she continued, "the lady is about three times his Lordship's age! A splendid fortune! The rich Miss Langley of Berkshire—she's the bride!"

Catherine felt a pressure on her arm; it spoke of an agony of feeling: she trembled herself for what might ensue.

The deaf lady answered, coldly, "Very likely it's not true."

This incredulity piqued the narrator.

"But I understand there's not a doubt of it," she replied: "it's just about to take place. The old lady—the bride elect, I should say—is now at Mivart's, very busy about the preparations. And she pays all his debts!"

The obliging gossip was ill-repaid for the prolonged exertion of her lungs. The single ejaculation, "Ridiculous!" was the only notice

vouchsafed by her auditor, whose attention was now again employed on her own affairs, her servitor having returned to his post. Nothing more was to be heard, and Lady Emma became ungovernably impatient to depart.

"Take any thing—all—just as you please; only let us go!" she whispered, imploringly, to Catherine.

And the latter complied with such perfect self-possession that the wild eagerness with which she was urged escaped observation: she had at least the comfort on quitting the shop of feeling sure that no distressing rumours could spread abroad from thence. But once safely shut into the carriage, Lady Emma yielded to the torrent of her feelings.

"It is not true! it is not true!" she repeated again and again, pressing her hands upon her throbbing temples. Then, in wild accents, half suffocated by a contending disposition to frantic laughter and violent weeping, "It cannot be! Marry *her!* She—she his wife!"

Catherine, herself utterly confounded by the intelligence, could only say from time to time,

"My dear Emma, try to control yourself! Think —we shall soon be at home——"

Her words had no effect; but an object they passed suddenly checked these passionate emotions. At the sight of Mivart's Lady Emma exclaimed, "There—in that house—I might know all! I cannot enter it, but *you* can——"

As she spoke her whole aspect and demeanour changed. Pale as a marble statue, her countenance was also as calm; nor was there in her voice any inflection betraying her inward agitation as she desired that the carriage should draw up to the hotel, and herself inquired if Miss Langley were within.

The answer was an unequivocal negative; she had gone out, but leaving word that she should soon return.

"Then," said Lady Emma to Catherine, "you can go in and wait for her."

"I, my dear Emma! No; indeed you must excuse me! What could I say?"

But the earnest answer was, "It will be perfectly easy. Do not refuse—pray do not! I ask only this!"

And Catherine found herself, she hardly knew how, in the hotel, and ushered to Miss Langley's suite of apartments. A few minutes spent in solitude did not render her better satisfied with her position; she became only the more sensible of the difficulty of conducting the delicate inquiry which was the sole object of her visit, and was much inclined to leave some trifling message as an excuse for her having been there, and depart as quickly as possible. But before she could quite resolve so to disregard Lady Emma's entreaties, her perplexity was terminated by the entrance of Marshall, whom she had remembered from childhood as Miss Langley's confidential servant. She was certain now of obtaining decisive information, for the good woman was in the habit of speaking her mind very freely in regard to her mistress's affairs. Her character was one of high integrity, but blended, as is especially common in those of her degree, with certain strong defects: warm and steadfast in affection, she was not unapt where her prejudices were concerned to cherish feelings of a vindictive nature. Catherine, knowing that such was her temper, was reluctant to say any thing

which might arouse it; but yet this was an opportunity of ascertaining the truth which she could hardly pass by. After a few slight remarks, therefore, she proceeded to say, "I have heard a very strange story this morning, Marshall, about your mistress. I am really ashamed to mention it: it cannot surely be true."

The woman's countenance, portentously gloomy before, became yet darker at the inquiry, and she answered, with a kind of indignant growl, "Yes; but it is, though! True! every word of it."

"Oh, Marshall, how shocking—how revolting!"

"Isn't it a sin and a shame? But I would not have my Lord make too sure of my mistress: she may do by him as she has by better people!"

"She may indeed change her mind; and I do hope she will! such a marriage is too——"

"Marriage!" interrupted the downright Marshall; "marriage! Why, Miss Mansfield, sure you don't suppose my mistress is so bewitched as to take this young lord for a husband?"

"Indeed," replied Catherine, feeling not a little humbled, "I must own I did, for that was what I heard."

"Then, ma'am," bluntly rejoined Marshall, "somebody or other told you a wicked lie, that's all! Bad enough as it is in all conscience, my mistress hadn't need, I think, do any thing worse than cast off her own, as I may say they are, for a stranger like this."

Catherine had hitherto been so entirely engrossed in solicitude for Lady Emma as to have forgotten how much the question affected likewise the fortunes of her earliest friend: with a lively sense of compunction did she now call it to mind.

"You do not mean to say," she asked, anxiously, "that Miss Langley has revoked her will?"

"Ah, but I do!" answered the honest woman, ruefully shaking her head: "I saw their hateful piece of parchment lying on this very table. If I could but have tossed it into the fire!"

"That would have done no good; another would soon have been prepared. But does the new will entirely set aside the former?"

"Yes, indeed does it! I am not sure that Mrs. Falconbridge isn't to have a thousand or two, just by way of remembrance. To her that was to have had it all! My mistress might as

well have let it alone: it's no better than a mockery!"

"I feel quite bewildered," resumed Catherine. "How did all this happen? Lord Henry left Leamington some time before Miss Langley. I thought their intimacy would be broken off."

"So I thought too, ma'am; and so it should, in all reason; but my mistress had had so much of his company there that she never afterwards could be easy without it. If you'd heard how she went on about his going away in that hurry! And it was no better when we got back to Beechwood; nothing would content her but that he must come there; and so come he did, and stay too; he was there, on and off, half the winter. The house was no sooner rid of him than there he was again!"

The unceremonious terms in which Marshall spoke of this highly descended young nobleman almost made Catherine smile, little as she was at the moment inclined to see things in a diverting point of view. But she doubted not that it was no uncommon instance of freedom, and that could peers, nay even princes, hear themselves and

their actions discussed among their dependants, it would do much to qualify any overweening sense of importance. Thus does one man indemnify himself for the outward deference he is obliged to render to another.

"Still, Marshall," said Catherine, "I want to understand this more thoroughly: was this new will Miss Langley's own voluntary act, or did she seem to be persuaded into it? I have serious reasons for wishing to know."

Marshall paused, honestly purposing to answer as dispassionately as she could.

"Why, Miss Mansfield," she said, at length, "I won't charge this young lord—though I do hate the sight of him!—with having done any thing very wrong about it: of course he was ready enough to take the advantage when it was offered to him. But, upon my word, strange as it is, I do believe that first and last it was her own doing! Isn't it a wonderful thing, no way to be accounted for except by witchcraft, which they say one mustn't believe in, that my mistress should be so forward to assist him that was all but a stranger to her, when she would never help

the Colonel, poor man! in his troubles without a great deal of grumbling and scolding? It's a fact that she's paid all his debts; and they're none so little, I hear. What is it that makes her put such a difference between the two, when they're so much alike in their ways?"

"They differ much in one respect: Lord Henry's manners are remarkably agreeable," answered Catherine. Marshall understood what was left unsaid.

"The Colonel's not a pleasant man; I won't say he is; but that's no fault of hers—Mrs. Falconbridge's, I mean—nor their poor boy's neither. Such a fine youth as Master Langley is growing! so tall, and so like his mother! Wait but a few years, and he'll be twenty times handsomer than my Lord there! And my mistress's own godson too, which is next thing to flesh and blood! Oh, but I forgot! the best of the matter is, they make it out that they're akin to each other!"

"Who? Miss Langley and Lord Henry?" said Catherine, in amazement.

"Ay, Miss Mansfield, you may well wonder;

but they really have got up such a story as that! Miss Lisle to serve her own ends, courting my mistress's favour, pretends to find out in some old book that my Lord's grandmother or great-great-grandmother was a Langley! And that took her fancy mightily; and now she's always bragging of the "connexion," as she calls it, though I've heard say all my life that she has no kin in the world, except it may be the poor folk down by the mill, whom one mustn't so much as name before her. And so when she's gone and he comes in for it all, then the Queen 's to give him leave to call himself Langley; and that's what my mistress calls keeping up her name and her family! Often and often, Miss Mansfield, it's as much as I can do to hold my tongue about their nonsense."

The words were hardly spoken when Miss Langley, accompanied by Miss Lisle, entered the room. She was evidently discomposed by the sight of her visitor.

"Nobody told me any one was here!" said she, abruptly.

"I was induced to come in," replied Catherine,

not a little disconcerted on her side, "by being told you had left word you should soon return."

"Certainly, certainly," was Miss Langley's reply, delivered more in her usual manner, "so I did. Very happy to see you! only a little surprised at first, not knowing you were in town. Ring, Lisle, ring for luncheon directly; this London air sharpens my appetite; though I don't know why it should, though, for it does not agree with me very well."

Notwithstanding this bustling hospitality, Catherine, sensible that the interview could not but be embarrassing to both parties, resolved to terminate it as quickly as possible. Some kind of reason was wanted for her being there: once more she asked for Mrs. Falconbridge's direction; she did indeed wish for it now particularly. But she could not utter the name without a sense of awkwardness, in which Miss Langley evidently participated. She answered, with hurried readiness, "Yes; I can give it: they are in England again—in town. I had a letter some little time since. I can't remember the name of the street; but I'll look for it, and you can write it down: it's in the escritoire there"—

pointing to an inner room—"you'll get it for me, I know, my good, obliging Lisle; I'm too fagged for any thing myself!"

A painful pause ensued: Miss Langley, facing the window, stared fixedly at the opposite houses; while Catherine directed her eyes in the contrary direction, watching anxiously the rummaging process which was going forward.

Miss Langley soon lost all patience.

"Bless me!" she cried; "what can Lisle be about all this time? There are not so many things in those drawers! I must go and look myself."

She went accordingly, tossed and turned over, but the object of her search did not appear.

"I never knew any thing so tiresome!" she peevishly exclaimed. "What can have become of the thing?"

Catherine regretted having given so much useless trouble, and begged the ransackers to desist.

"No, no," answered Miss Langley; "I must and will find it, I'm determined! Summon Marshall, Lisle; it's her business to find whatever I mislay."

The waiting-maid's countenance darkened much when she understood what task she had to perform.

"If you please to remember, ma'am," said she, "it came just when"—speaking very huskily—"when that lawyer was here the other day."

"Was it then? I didn't recollect it."

"No, ma'am, I dare say not; but I do: it came just at that moment you heard he was here, and you said you hadn't time to read it, and gave it to me to lock up in the cabinet in the dressing-room."

"Well, now you remind me, so I did! Go and fetch it, then; Miss Mansfield wants it."

"Miss Mansfield!" murmured Marshall, indignantly flouncing out of the room. The letter presently appeared, the seal yet unbroken. Miss Langley's hand shook a little in opening it, and she dropped another in a boyish character which it enclosed. She eagerly pointed out the direction to Catherine.

"The neighbourhood of the Regent's Park, you see," said she: "not easy to find out; perhaps some little by-street."

Meanwhile, Marshall pertinaciously presented the rejected godchild's letter.

"Won't you read it, ma'am? Won't you see what dear Master Langley has to say for himself, before you cast him off for ever?—him that you used to be so fond and so proud of, and that has your name, real and natural, from the time he was christened, without any need of these fine make-believe orders from the Queen!"

"Marshall!" exclaimed Miss Langley, reddening, "you strangely forget your duties this morning."

"If I do," rejoined the over-zealous partisan, "perhaps it's because my betters has set me the example!"

"This insolence is intolerable!" rejoined the mistress, no less excited. "Leave the room—and don't let me see you till you can keep your tongue in better control!"

Marshall obeyed, but aggravated the offence in her mode of exit—slamming the door after her with great violence.

"Upon my word," said Miss Langley, "this is a little too bad! People say truly enough, Keep an

old servant, and she expects to be your mistress at last."

"My dear madam," remonstrated Miss Lisle, in her most honied accents, "you should not allow yourself to be disturbed by any thing that a poor weak waiting-woman can say! What is she but the creature of your bounty, spoiled by your own indulgence?"

"Very true, very true! I have treated her too well, as I do every one that comes in my way; it has always been my weakness. But I'll alter it henceforth, they may assure themselves: I'm not to be browbeat out of my own will and pleasure by gentle or simple! When I made that will Maria Rashleigh was young and agreeable, and I don't mean to say she has ever given me much cause of complaint. If she had always lived single, as a wise woman should, we might have gone on well enough together. But after she married that great tall tyrant of hers, what comfort had I in her? His behaviour to me was most abominable: he takes my money to squander on his absurd electioneering schemes, and then attempts to carry it off with a high hand, because in the end he expects it

to come to his wife! Now that's not what *I* expected, I can tell him—not what I think I had a right to expect."

"Never, surely," interposed the parasite, "was such generosity so unworthily requited!"

"And what if the boy was named after me? that does not oblige me to make him my heir in preference to a relation of my own! For you must know, Miss Mansfield, I have traced a connexion between my family and Lord Henry's. How is it, Lisle? I am not quite expert at it yet."

Miss Lisle, upon this appeal, methodically repeated the genealogical lesson.

"His Lordship's great-grandmother was the daughter of Jane, wife of Sir Peter Langley, of Culverstock, county Devon—by her Ladyship's first husband."

This last clause was delivered with a suppressed smile, and rather *sotto voce*. But the precaution was unnecessary, Miss Langley being unable to perceive how entirely it negatived her pretensions. That the names of Langley and Beauchamp were to be found on the same page was enough to satisfy her as to their affinity.

"Ah!" she remarked, complacently, "I thought it was as near as that. Culverstock—that's the name of the—what do you say it is, Lisle?"

"The seat of the elder branch of the Langleys," rejoined Miss Lisle, with the same covert expression of derision.

"In short," resumed Miss Langley, "the matter comes to this: I don't choose to be bound down to what I intended years ago, when things were entirely different! I revoke my will and make a new one; and who shall pretend to say I have not a right to do so?"

"What Miss Mansfield's opinion may be," sneeringly returned Miss Lisle, "is more than I can pretend to say. For my own part, I think nothing can be more equitable than the arrangement just effected."

"Equitable, certainly, in a legal point of view," said Catherine, with an irrepressible sigh.

Miss Langley was disturbed, touched by conscience, but not shaken in determination. "It's no use talking of it, Miss Mansfield," said she; "my mind's made up, and not without good reason. I don't say I shall take no more

notice of the Falconbridges. Nobody, I believe, has ever found me hard-hearted. If Langley behaves to my satisfaction, there's no saying what I may do to help him forward in the world. But as to any thing of a division—if that's what you have in your mind—it's entirely out of the question. The estate goes with the name, and Lord Henry Beauchamp is to bear that name"—sighing—"some day or other. So, if you do see them, I hope you'll make them clearly understand it."

"Pardon me for declining; I cannot speak of it."

"I wish to my heart," said Miss Langley, "I had never thought of leaving Maria Rashleigh so much as a single penny! How much trouble I should have spared myself! It was a thing done all in a hurry—the act of a moment. A very, very nice girl she was then—that I will say for her; but it's gone by now: you'll find her an altered woman."

"So I fear," was Catherine's only reply.

"I declare," said Miss Langley, "you really look quite down-hearted! And I'm not in spirits

myself. It's well luncheon-time is come. Do come and join us! A glass of sherry will do you an immense deal of good. It always sets me up."

But Catherine declined the offered restorative, and returned at once to Grosvenor Square. Her mind in this visit had been alternately occupied by two subjects of deep interest, the one for the time excluding the other. Lady Emma was alone present to her thoughts when she entered the house; she left it grieving profoundly for Mrs. Falconbridge. But at the sight of the former, whose countenance was radiant with joy, her thoughts were again diverted.

"I know it all, my dear, kind friend!" cried Lady Emma: "you have nothing to tell. Since you left me I have received a letter conveying the strange happy news. How ashamed I am to have given a moment's credence to that ridiculous tale! Good, excellent, charming old lady!"

"My dear Emma, this is the very woman you held in such repugnance!"

"I know; I own it. Chide me if you will! But that letter—it is so delightful!" And in her

transport of excitement she clung closely to Catherine. The embrace was returned with the most affectionate sympathy, but the latter's spirits were too depressed for speech; she could with difficulty restrain her tears.

"I see how it is," said Lady Emma, now looking earnestly at her: "you are afraid for him. Do not, pray do not judge him hardly! He has been very imprudent, very wrong, but it was in other circumstances. It will be different now. You do not know, no one yet knows of what he is capable!"

"Dear Emma, I cannot but be anxious for your sake; but I have a present grief. There is another, whom I loved before you were born: the event which makes you so joyful is her ruin!"

A perceptible start and an expression of the liveliest concern changed Lady Emma's whole aspect. The strong revulsion of feeling deprived her at first of the power of speech.

"Poor Mrs. Falconbridge!" she said, at length; "how could I for a moment forget that? How sad! how grievous! But does this new will quite set aside the other? Cannot there be some kind

of compromise? They say Miss Langley's wealth is really enormous. We—he cannot possibly want it all! He does not yet know how it is: I will tell him all."

Catherine smiled mournfully. "Her mind is quite made up," she said. "I do not think Lord Henry himself could persuade her to make any alteration, were he ever so much disposed to do so."

Lady Emma was silent, and a sudden return of colour told that she felt painfully the force of the implied doubt. But she recurred to the subject some time afterwards. Seeing Catherine deeply engaged in writing, "Pardon me for asking," she said, "but is that letter for Mrs. Falconbridge?"

"It is: have you any thing to say?"

"Much, if I might speak of myself; but I have no plea: she does not know that this affects me. But he—*you* know how it happened—could you not say something for him?"

Then, seeing a dubious expression on Catherine's face, she hastily added, "No, no; I feel it would be wrong! his very name must be painful to her."

The words ended in a heartfelt sigh, even though Lord Henry's letter was still in her hand—that letter declaring with passionate ardour that the promised wealth would be valueless in his eyes, did it not give him the privilege of coming forward openly as her suitor.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN the real nature of Lord Henry's relations with Miss Langley became generally known, his friends were loud in congratulation. To have the prospect of succeeding a stranger old lady in a vast property without the unwelcome condition of having her for a partner while she lived, was indeed the *ne plus ultra* of good luck. But he was far from being as thoroughly content with his position as they supposed. The answer from Lord Donnington was unsatisfactory. Not all the solid advantages it was now in his power to offer could reconcile the latter to the final abandonment of his visionary hopes respecting Sir Aubrey; he therefore replied in lengthy,

evasive terms, not absolutely refusing the lover's prayer, but withholding that prompt assent on which he had too confidently relied.

Miss Dallas about this time, becoming weary of her foreign sojourn, persuaded her still anxious parent that it might be consistent with her safety to return to her native land. She was mortified to find it beyond her power to disturb her friend Emma's tranquillity as before. Though not admitted to the latter's confidence, she shrewdly divined that her reliance on Lord Henry's affection had been confirmed. Deprived of this weapon of annoyance, she made use of another, speaking frequently of the lately-made will as the happy result of "bold design and dexterous management." Lady Emma had usually sufficient self-command to treat these insinuations with contempt; but she was sometimes betrayed into a little altercation on the subject. Thus engaged, they were one morning interrupted by the entrance of that same Miss Ufford who had joined Lady Emma and her party at the Leamington *fête*. In apology for a very early visit the young lady said, "The fact is, I came on purpose to tell you of a

wonderful piece of news which concerns you. But perhaps you know it already?"

"No," replied Lady Emma, calm in the confidence that nothing that could very materially affect her happiness would now be likely to come upon her unawares.

Right glad to find herself not forestalled, the narrator thus proceeded: "You remember, I dare say, that pleasant *fête* at Leamington, Lord Henry Beauchamp's, and his insisting on introducing Miss Langley to Lady Margaret——"

"Pardon me, it appeared to me that the introduction was in consequence of Miss Langley's own urgent desire. It is of no consequence," she continued, dreading some satirical comment from Miss Dallas; "it does not at all signify how it happened, only in repeating matters of fact it is as well to be as accurate as possible."

"No doubt," replied Miss Ufford, too eager to go on to take any offence at this rebuke, "no doubt one should be correct, I am sure I meant to be so. But, however it was, you know Lord Henry did introduce Miss Langley, and then

she brought forward a friend of hers, a Miss Clare —do you recollect her?"

"Certainly; she was exceedingly pretty."

"So many people said: I did not think her at all remarkable. However, my news is about her: she's going to be married directly to a gentleman whom they say she first met there—now, do guess!"

"There must be some great disparity, I suppose, or else I do not see what wonder there can be in it. The bridegroom is old, perhaps?"

Miss Ufford smiled broadly, and shook her head.

"People may be unequal in other ways than in age. Do you know who this Miss Clare is? Actually the daughter of a country attorney! Now, then, match her with one of the principal persons there—I don't mean among the hosts, or perhaps you might guess Lord Henry himself!"

Lady Emma looked perplexed, and attempted no conjecture.

"Think!" said Miss Ufford: "he was very near when that introduction took place."

"My cousin—Sir Aubrey! you cannot mean him?"

"Indeed but I do! But I beg pardon! as he is your cousin, perhaps I ought not to have told it so abruptly."

"You will excuse me for saying that I do not believe it!" interposed Miss Dallas.

"You do not!" answered the informant, drawing up with dignity: "I had three letters this morning, all speaking of it most positively."

"It is strange news, certainly," said Lady Emma; "but not incredible."

"A dreadful blow to poor Lady Margaret," said Miss Ufford: "every body pities her."

"Let them wait till they know whether they have cause," said Lady Emma, tranquilly.

Miss Ufford, amazed that her intelligence had been so calmly received, soon took leave. But it had, in truth, produced considerable effect on the nerves of both her auditors. To the one it was the downfall of a baseless fabric indeed, a project of ambition raised only in her own fancy, but one which she was ill-pleased to abandon. The other had listened with a more

lively interest than she cared to show, in part for her own sake, still more for another's. The rumour was not unfounded. Lady Margaret soon notified the approaching event to the Marquis, with a judicious regard to the effect it would have upon him. Having freely acknowledged Miss Clare's humble parentage, she proceeded thus: "My own objections were strong, but they have yielded to reasons which I trust will overcome your Lordship's also. My future daughter-in-law is not less remarkable for the perfections of mind and heart than for personal charms, insomuch that I do hope you will recognize her as one well qualified for the elevation in rank she is about to receive."

It was the Marquis's habit carefully to preserve all correspondence: whatever related to affairs of his, even the most insignificant, possessed in his estimation little less importance than a document of State. But Lady Margaret's letter was an exception to this rule: it was reduced to ashes within ten minutes after perusal. Apology—palliation—what would not mothers attempt? It was singular, certainly. Such degrading alliances were happily not of very common occurrence. And

that two should come in *his* way! First his granddaughter's uncle; now his own kinsman and heir!

Such were his Lordship's cogitations on the subject: the only notice he vouchsafed was a formal acknowledgment by the hand of Mr. Selby, to whom, on his own account, the announcement was not less mortifying than it was to his patron.

Far different were Lady Emma's congratulations. Delighted to be assured that her cousin had so completely overcome his hopeless predilection for herself as to love and wed another, she wrote to his mother in terms that drew tears from her eyes. Nor was the son unmoved. Miss Ufford had not been incorrect as to dates. The day of the Leamington *fête*, intolerably disagreeable while passing, now shone radiantly in memory, as the epoch of his first beholding the Juliet who was soon to succeed a gentle but inexorable Rosalind. Some degree of likeness in look and manner between the two had struck him even then, moodily dejected as he was. Other accidental meetings occurred. Mrs. Clare had relations in a higher position than her own, among

whom her daughter was willingly admitted. Sir Aubrey became more and more impressed with her strong resemblance to the object of his first affection. He saw her at home; the conquest was complete: only now the order was reversed. It was Emma Vere who bore a happy resemblance to his own Lucy, more than worthy of all the honours it was in his power to confer on her.

This singular union was not universally condemned. Sir Aubrey's character stood high, and the majority of those who knew him thought it safe to suspend their judgment till they could ascertain what effect his conduct produced on his own happiness.

Meantime the immediate effect of the marriage was the conclusion of another. The Marquis lent a gracious ear to the suit which Lord Henry urgently renewed. It was expedient to cover the disgrace which his house had sustained, by an alliance with one of equal dignity. A cadet of the Delaval race ranked higher in his estimation than any peer created within the last two centuries. There was even some advantage in

Lord Henry's not being himself a noble. The title of Elvastone would not be merged in another; it would hold its due place as an ancient barony, which was next best to its remaining attached to the house of Donnington. The accepted lover was graced by other marks of fortune's favour. Miss Langley, more than ever proud of her own relations with him, actual and imaginary, assigned him at once a befitting income. The fair betrothed was formally presented to her, though not without some secret reluctance. Highly gratified, she was, to use her own phrase, "upon her best behaviour" on the occasion; but it was not altogether adapted to the taste and feelings of those whom she received. She made much jocular allusion to the "stolen interview," as she called it, in which she had surprised them, and to her own penetration in regard to it. The next subject of pleasantry was an alleged semi-flirtation between Lord Henry and "pretty Lucy, my Lady Vere that now is!" Provoked at the audacity of the charge, and half alarmed lest it should make some impression on Lady Emma, he vindicated himself with a warmth highly amusing to his

assailant, till, having urged him almost beyond the bounds of patience, she avowed that it was all meant only for "a little harmless sport." Lady Emma's dislike revived in all its force; but it was so subdued by natural gentleness and acquired good-breeding as to be quite imperceptible to its object. Miss Langley was enchanted with her, and added largely to her intended nuptial gifts.

No vexatious obstacle impeded the happiness of the affianced. All was soon arranged: the day itself arrived. The Marchioness, steadfast in her disapprobation of the union, though she had not essayed a combat with her lord, withdrew from the unwelcome bustle to a sister's residence, but allowed Catherine to remain—a favour for which the latter was most grateful, and which Lady Emma on her own part warmly acknowledged. Almost every one claiming connexion with the two great families the contract was to unite assembled on the occasion. But several of the company felt little gratification. Miss Dallas, though she accepted the office of bridemaid with seeming readiness, was secretly chagrined at

having to appear in that attendant capacity, and the more because she could not but be conscious of being outshone in personal charms by several of her fellows in the train.

Her book of Fate may be here unrolled. It was not such as she even then presumed it would be. Not only had her hopes of becoming a Marchioness proved fallacious, neither did Earl, Viscount, Baron come forward; no, nor even one holding but her father's degree of honour! At length, rather than leave the name of Elizabeth Dallas to be inscribed on her tomb, she accepted the suit which a plain country gentleman, in no happy hour for himself, was induced to prefer. She went to the altar in her thirty-seventh year, with a stinging consciousness that the girls of that day were pointing at her all the ill-natured remarks which had been so familiar to her own lips when at their age. But what was this to the fate of Lady Arabella Vere? She never married at all!

Nor were these the only two whose frame of mind was far from joyous. The Duke of Ilminster, loving dearly his wife's orphan niece,

felt almost parental anxiety in seeing her conclude an engagement not likely, he considered, to place her happiness on a very firm basis. Her own uncle, Viscount Coningsby, did not at all participate in this solicitude, seeing nothing to disapprove in the bridegroom except his being exactly at that point in life to which he himself vainly longed to return. But to him all grand family gatherings were a most severe penance, because he then pertinaciously insisted on his spouse's companionship, which at other times it was his especial object to avoid.

And her Ladyship was not at all better pleased. Besides a reciprocal distaste for her lord's society, she entertained a peculiar repugnance to this ceremony. Having allowed herself to believe that Lord Henry's admiration of her was so excessive that no other woman could obtain any hold on his affections, it was far from agreeable to witness so convincing a proof of her mistake. She accepted the invitation with which she was honoured chiefly because she knew that in so doing she should greatly annoy the Duchess of Ilminster.

That consolation she enjoyed in full measure.

Her Grace had employed all possible means to procure her exclusion; but Lord Donnington had arrived at that period of life when men, though often obstinate in maintaining an old quarrel, can seldom be brought needlessly to engage in a new one. He had strongly condemned her brother's match when it took place, and so, he emphatically assured her, he did to that very hour. But he knew that to omit the wife would exceedingly enrage the husband, and preferred the alternative of displeasing one whose sex rendered her passions rather less formidable.

The Duchess therefore came to her niece's nuptials in a most uncongenial mood. In fact she had not been at all desirous of seeing her early married, knowing, as she did, that she should herself in consequence lose no small share of influence in society. Every thing was to her a source of provocation: the Marquis had taken the whole affair under his own management, leaving her only the uninteresting formality of presiding at the entertainment. Her critical eye detected a thousand blemishes in the order of proceedings—customs out of date, things ill planned, ill executed.

A miserable failure! as might have been expected from its being in the hands of a man—a decrepit, obstinate old man too, like Lord Donnington!

But of all these heart-burnings there was no outward symptom. The spectators who thronged the aisles and galleries of St. George's Church saw only a large assemblage of ladies and gentlemen in goodly apparel, and rejoicing, doubtless, in many high-sounding names. The central group was strikingly interesting: a young and handsome couple receiving from episcopal lips the nuptial benediction. Even the Marquis, bent with age and infirmity, showed to advantage when in the act of consigning his orphan granddaughter to the love and protection of another.

The company adjourned as usual to a sumptuous repast, after which the principal personages on either side exchanged professions of satisfaction in the alliance just completed. In so doing they could not well omit some notice of her to whom it was in fact attributable—the author of Lord Henry's sudden prosperity; but their compliments were frigid enough. Such as they were, however, coming from a Duke and Marquis, her small

degree of judgment could not bear their weight. Inflated with self-complacency, she responded in a manner not a little mortifying to the bridegroom, who felt himself to be in some measure involved in the ridicule she provoked. He hastened his departure in consequence. The guests gathered round with final good wishes. Those of Lady Coningsby were alone distinguished by any striking originality. Observing her husband to be within hearing, she said, as she kissed her niece, "May your married life, my love, be as much as possible the reverse of mine!"

The bride recoiled, painfully startled by such a form of adieu. Lord Henry advanced to lead her away; but recollecting herself, she drew back, exclaiming, "Where is Miss Mansfield?" and, darting into an adjoining apartment, she threw herself into Catherine's arms. Hitherto she had shed no tears; now they could no longer be repressed. This was *the* parting: in no other female heart had she ever found sympathy fond and true! Lord Henry disengaged her with much gentleness from that close embrace, and said, in a tone of earnest feeling, "This is quite natural, Miss Mans-

field: I know all you have been to her. This day has made us friends for life!" he added, cordially grasping her hand; and himself lowering the veil of his weeping bride, he led her from Catherine's sight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE last carriage had driven off; the last loitering errand-boy had gone on his way; the female head farthest protruded from the upper window of a neighbouring house was at length withdrawn; the doors of the mansion were closed; the removal of the banquet with all its superb appurtenances was nearly accomplished; the household was settling down into its usual condition of strict order and gravity; and the Marquis of Donnington himself, in his easiest chair, reposed with half-closed eyes on the soothing conviction that he could never again experience the fatigue of giving away a grandchild. And already Catherine Mansfield had laid aside the garb appropriate to the occasion—of which it may be remarked,

by-the-bye, that it had been honoured with the notice of two of the illustrious company just dispersed. To Miss Langley, herself more gorgeously arrayed than on any former day of her life, it seemed in its simplicity absolutely a blemish in the spectacle. The Duchess of Ilminster, on the other hand, thoroughly out of humour as she was, recognized it in her own mind as being in remarkably good taste.

It was now exchanged for a walking costume, with a very different object. Had there been any room for choice, Catherine would not have selected that day to seek out her unfortunate friend; but it was the extreme bound of her liberty; the Marchioness was to return on the morrow. She set forth, therefore, on her expedition with a mingled sense that she was going to meet pain and pleasure. The way was long and, in the latter part, entirely unknown to her. As she threaded a labyrinth of narrow, new-built streets, she felt it to be probable, as Miss Langley had unfeelingly remarked, that the neighbourhood had been preferred as affording a good refuge from importunate creditors. Among its humble popula-

tion the unfortunate stranger family might dwell unnoticed. Tracing her course by casual direction almost step by step, Catherine was at length assured of having reached her destination by seeing the Colonel's own stately figure issue from one of these lowly abodes. But how changed since last beheld beneath the portico of his own handsome mansion! Though at some distance, she could too plainly discern symptoms of the apprehensions which had led him to that obscure district. He stood a moment looking up and down the street, evidently scrutinizing jealously the few persons passing along; and even when satisfied that none were likely to molest him, shrouded the lower part of his face in the collar of his cloak, and drew his hat much over his brow, before he ventured to proceed. She was glad that, by taking the opposite direction, he unconsciously spared her and himself the awkwardness of meeting, and did not approach the house till he was fairly out of sight. Deplorable was the contrast to that parting at Holme Cliffe. A slip-shod woman, after some preliminary reconnoitring from below, at length appeared at the door: she was

probably the mistress of the house, officiating as the sole domestic of her unfortunate inmates. There was some difficulty in procuring admission: a suspicious stare was at first the only answer to the inquiry for Mrs. Falconbridge.

"Is she at home?" she asked, anxiously.

"Can't say for certain."

"But will you see? Will you take up this?"—holding out a card. "I am no stranger, indeed!"

The woman did not move; and the parley might have ended unfavourably but for a third interlocutor who now came forward. The face and form of Langley Falconbridge were no otherwise altered than as being much enlarged; the noble child had grown into an uncommonly fine boy. Certain who he was, Catherine addressed him by name, telling him also her own, and was at once conducted to his mother. Catherine's first sensation on seeing her friend was of the most pleasurable kind. Changed she was, undoubtedly, in the character of her beauty, but hardly less attractive than in her earlier and happier days. If the bloom of the complexion had faded, the marble purity that remained seemed

to enhance the fine outline of feature, more expressive now than formerly of calm and elevated thought. She started in surprise as Catherine entered; then the work over which she was bending fell to the ground, as she arose in haste for a greeting in the old sister-like fashion. For an instant all but the joy of seeing each other again, after the lapse of so many years, was forgotten; but, too soon, painful circumstances came to mind.

"I know how it happens you are at liberty this morning," said Mrs. Falconbridge, with a faint smile. "We are not unapprised of the enemy's movements."

Catherine was grieved. "Dear Maria," said she, earnestly, "it is but too natural that you should use that word; but indeed it is most inapplicable, to her at least!"

"My little enemy? You know I called her so when we met at Beaulieu, because she had taken you from me. But for this last stroke I certainly was not prepared. It would seem as if she and I must always be in opposition to each other!"

It was difficult to find a reply. Catherine did

not attempt it; but Mrs. Falconbridge, reading her feelings in her face, spoke again in an altered manner.

"Pardon me," she said; "do not let me distress you by my idle speaking: you cannot think me serious. I was only seeking to beguile the weariness of reviewing the true cause of our calamities. I well know the origin of this last disappointment. Nor do I repine at it as wholly unmerited. I did not feel ashamed when that first will was made; and for some time afterwards I preserved the affection of my childhood, at least in some measure. But I changed greatly—I felt I did: gratitude itself could not overcome it. And my husband's aversion—you saw how it was in those few days you spent with us—it became worse and worse whenever they were together. Nothing, in short, in the whole affair has occasioned me any surprise but the choice of my successor. I did not, I own, expect to be supplanted by a total stranger! for I cannot credit the story of their relationship. Do you?"

"Oh, no; nothing can be more groundless, more absurd!"

"Then he actually owes it all to imposture!" exclaimed Mrs. Falconbridge, the lustre of her fine eyes rekindled by natural indignation.

"No, indeed!" answered Catherine: "he framed no false pretence; he only tacitly acquiesced in her chimerical persuasion. Few young men, perhaps, would have been proof against such a temptation."

"Few such as he is represented to be," replied Mrs. Falconbridge. "Perhaps, however, public report does him some wrong. Tell me your own opinion of his character."

"Do not ask me to-day," answered Catherine, with glistening eyes. "He has many faults," she presently added; "but still there is room for hope—now especially."

"Is Lady Emma's mind your work, or that of her aunt the Duchess? Much depends on that."

"The Duchess can claim no part in it at all. As for myself, she was so young when taken from my charge that I hardly know whether I had any share. I left her a sweet child, and find her again a most amiable woman."

"Do you think his attachment to her was wholly disinterested? She was, in the world's language, 'an excellent match.'"

"True; but I sincerely believe that was not his attraction."

"Was it beauty, then?"

"Not altogether, certainly; she can hardly be accounted beautiful. I think the charm consisted chiefly in her ingenuous disposition."

There was a tone of mournful interest in these inquiries, which Catherine, as she answered them, well understood. When next Mrs. Falconbridge spoke, it was with something of her former playfulness.

"Do you not see what an excellent sempstress I am become? I must challenge your admiration for my improvement. In former times I did but trifle with my needle: it has all come since I left Holme Cliffe."

"How grieved I was to hear of that! It came upon me with a sudden shock."

"Did I not tell you of it?"

"No; you never mentioned the subject. I heard of it only a few months ago from Miss Langley."

"You are the best of friends to forgive me! It was no studied concealment, however: from day to day I meant to write; but it was, after my usual manner, delayed till I felt ashamed of making a communication so much out of date. What *did* I tell you at last?"

"Nothing, but that you were going abroad on a plan of retrenchment."

"So we called it; but our difficulties were far too heavy to be materially lightened by that method. To say nothing of those terrible election expenses, we had long been rising higher in our style of living. I knew little of the means by which it was supported; Colonel Falconbridge did not like me to inquire; and so it came all at once upon me that we must quit our happy home! The worst of all was when poor Langley asked when we were to return. That 'never' did cost me a pang!"

There was a pause; but Mrs. Falconbridge soon regained complete composure.

"For my boy's sake," said she, "I much regret our long wanderings abroad. He is naturally studious, and, if maternal partiality does not very

much deceive me, clever also; but frequent changes of school have been much against him."

"Do not fear; his countenance assures me that he will rise above all disadvantages. For what profession do you design him?"

"His father's would be his choice: his favourite sports and studies are all martial. He delights much in reading of the heroes of antiquity, and often wants me for an auditor. Your knock just now interrupted us in the demolition of Carthage. But I fear all his ardour will be wasted. I see no means of his entering on that career."

"Has not the Colonel influential friends?"

Mrs. Falconbridge shook her head expressively.

"There have been many disagreements. All our prospects are overcast——"

A knock heard at that instant called a momentary flush to her cheek. "It is only the Colonel," she said, in answer to Catherine's look of inquiry. "Do not go! it may be long before I see you again. He will not come in, I dare say; he generally sits alone all the morning."

But as she spoke her husband entered, followed by their son. Catherine, on this nearer view, was

really shocked by the Colonel's aspect. His face was absolutely haggard, his figure drooped, his dress betokened something of careless indifference quite foreign to his original habits. As his haughty glance fell upon her, she almost felt guilty of undue freedom in having entered his dwelling. But all personal feeling was presently lost in sympathy with her friend. The hand which Mrs. Falconbridge, as he came into the room, involuntarily drew over her work, could not conceal it from his keen eye, and his figure regained for a moment all its natural erectness, as he pointedly remarked, "I thought you understood that I entirely disapprove all such employments."

"But, my dear Frederick, they are really necessary."

"The woman's business, I should say."

"No, indeed; that is no part of her engagement; nor is she at all equal to the task. Indeed, there is nothing in my undertaking it: princesses have done the same. The captives in the Temple, not so very long ago, set the world that example."

Not a muscle of his face relaxed as he heard her

exculpation. The "Do as you please" which can convey so stern an expression of disapprobation was his only reply as he turned to leave the room. But, pausing at the door, he looked around as if for something for which in his present mood he would not condescend to ask.

"You are looking for the newspaper, Papa," said Langley, eagerly divining his wish: "it was here just now. Mamma, I thought you had it."

Mrs. Falconbridge, colouring deeply, drew forth the missing paper from beneath her work, and without raising her eyes gave it into her husband's hand. He took it with the same air of cold indifference; but rapid and frightful was the change as he caught sight of what it had been her object to keep from him, a paragraph alluding in absurdly inflated terms to the munificence of "a certain wealthy lady" on the occasion of a marriage in high life to be celebrated that morning. The first shade of passion on his brow was of that of scorn; the next was of a fiercer character. Forgetful or regardless of a stranger's presence, he muttered a terrible imprecation, comprehending at once Miss Langley, Lord Henry, and

himself, threw the paper on the table, and strode from the room. There was a dismayed silence. Catherine could not even raise her eyes till she heard these words, spoken steadily, though in the saddest accent: "I feared that unfortunate article would produce this effect."

"Why did you not warn me, Mamma?" said Langley mournfully.

"It would have been of no avail, my dear boy: he must have seen it, sooner or later; it was only just then——"

Catherine felt what was here implied, and really hated herself for having, involuntarily though it were, inflicted such a pang on a wife and son. Mrs. Falconbridge, knowing her mind most intimately, well understood this, and exerted herself to speak again with less dejection: "Time will have its effect: the first is the worst."

No further allusion was made to the subject, though it could not but be uppermost in the memories of all three. Catherine inquired particularly after all the members of the Rashleigh family; but here also she felt that she touched on a painful theme, for the answers indicated too

plainly that the daughter and sister was debarred from personal intercourse. That she was evidently happy as a mother was the one consolatory conviction to be carried away. Such comfort had they, however, in being together that Catherine prolonged her stay till she again heard the Colonel's footstep on the stairs. Langley escorted her to the door as he had brought her from it, and they parted with the greatest cordiality.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO days afterwards Catherine again saw Langley Falconbridge; but, much to her surprise, he evidently shunned meeting her. Looking steadfastly in another direction, he turned into the first street which intersected that in which they were. She questioned the evidence of her senses: was it really he? did he see her? She could not resist the impulse to write to his mother on the subject, though the letter was no sooner posted than she regretted having done so, fearing lest he might have been acting in obedience to his father's order. But the answer she received explained the mystery in another manner:—

"You did see Langley, and he also saw you; and I have nothing to plead in his excuse but the

extreme depression of his spirits. He and I are now sole companions; my husband has left us to return again to the Continent. This step may be advisable, as he says it is, under the circumstances, nevertheless it grieves us deeply. He wishes me to go to Ardwell; but I prefer remaining here. Perhaps in a little time he may be induced to return, or to summon us to join him abroad."

Catherine read this communication with much concern. However disguised by a wife's lenient statement, the plain fact was that Colonel Falconbridge had left those who depended on him to struggle unsupported with distresses he had himself brought upon them. His conduct had, indeed, been more cruelly selfish than she was allowed to know. The letter he left to explain his abrupt departure was couched in these terms:—

"I find it absolutely necessary, Maria, to separate for a time from you and Langley. I am maddened by what I daily witness: if I am to exist at all, it must be abroad and alone. Do not attempt to follow me; write to Ardwell: you may remain there till you hear more from me."

What to do at this conjuncture was Catherine's

serious consideration. There was one who had it in her power to befriend the deserted mother and son, and who had declared herself to be ready so to do in case of need. After much reflection she determined on informing Miss Langley of what had occurred, not making the worst of the fugitive's conduct, but trying how far it might act in favour of those whom he had forsaken. The effect was lively: Miss Langley, not altogether easy as to her own usage of her *ci-devant* favourite, felt relieved by finding that she had experienced still worse from another.

"What! gone off! actually absconded! you don't tell me so!" she cried. "Well, that's what I call scandalous behaviour! Oh, never tell me of his feelings! I've no patience with him! I declare it quite enrages me. I'll go directly and tell the poor soul what I think of him: I sha'n't be easy till I've spoken my mind about it."

Catherine was alarmed, well knowing that nothing could be less consolatory to her friend than the hearing a torrent of rude invective against her husband; but happily it was not difficult to divert Miss Langley from her purpose. She soon

became conscious that it would be a very awkward as well as a very dismal visit. But under the influence of this fit of compassion she expressed herself desirous again to see her godson.

"Let him come and spend a week with me," said she. "I should like to know whether we can get on better together now: he may be improved. Besides, till the young couple come back I rather stand in need of lively companions; Lisle's an excellent creature in her way, but she's not very amusing."

Mrs. Falconbridge was at first inclined to censure her friend for having been too communicative; but she soon acknowledged that she ought not, from jealous regard for her husband's character, to omit any chance of benefiting her son; and sent him accordingly. He went unwillingly, but with a sincere intention of conforming to his godmother's inclinations as far as he could. But notwithstanding his improved appearance, from handsome to handsomer, Catherine, who introduced them to each other, at once perceived that the measure was not likely to be attended by any happy results. A few days made this quite cer-

tain. While walking in the square she observed Langley loitering without, evidently now as much desirous of joining her as he had been lately anxious to shun her. Thanking her for the admission she hastened to give him, he observed, "I have been here several days in hopes of seeing you."

The tone was that of dejection; Catherine feigned, however, not to notice it, and answered, cheerfully, "You find your godmother kind, I dare say? she was always indulgent to young people."

"So Mamma says," he replied. And then, after a short pause, proceeded, "Yes, she means to be kind, I can see; but yet somehow she spoils it all. She is always speaking disagreeably of Papa; and then that Miss Lisle who lives with her is sure to join in and agree to all she says, though she does not seem ever to have known him at all."

"Miss Lisle is in the habit of agreeing to whatever Miss Langley says."

"Because she is rich—how mean that is! I wish the day after to-morrow were come—for then I should be going home!"

A silence of some minutes ensued. Langley was apparently revolving some important question in his mind.

"Pray tell me," he at length resumed, "how it is between Papa and Miss Langley? I know she behaved very ill to him: what can she mean, then, by calling him ungrateful? She must be saying what is not true."

"No, not so; she has acted very unkindly to your mother; but I believe she did render your father considerable service in his difficulties."

"Do you mean that he ever borrowed any money of her?"

"Yes; I have heard so. In his heavy electioneering expenses it was natural, under the circumstances, that he should have recourse to her."

"I am very sorry he did! However, Miss Mansfield, he really was obliged to stand those elections. I recollect the last very well; it was just before we went abroad. A great many friends came to him every day, and they all said he would be extremely wrong if he gave up, and that he was quite sure to come in that time."

Again he walked in silence beside her; and then abruptly asked, "How much would it require to pay all my father's debts?"

"Indeed I do not at all know!"

"But cannot you give me some idea? Five—ten thousand pounds, perhaps?"

"More, I should fear," she answered, reluctantly.

"More than ten!" he exclaimed, in the astonishment of youthful ignorance; and it was long before he resumed with, "I cannot bear the thought of going down to live upon my grandfather at Ardwell! I want to be making my own way in the world."

"You must have patience, my dear Langley; you cannot be a soldier yet!"

"A soldier!" he repeated, with a sigh: "no, I shall never be that: we have neither money nor interest now. *That* must be given up. But I think I should like the Navy almost as well: at all events, I could enter it at once. And then," he continued, with brightening eyes—"then I might in time, perhaps, become rich, and pay Miss Langley and every one else! Don't you think

so?" he inquired, not seeing much encouragement in her look. "In war-time, you know, they took very large prizes."

"Sometimes; but happily there is no war at present, and, as it now is, the service I am afraid seldom leads to wealth."

"Well, but if I did not become rich, at least I should not be on any body's hands. If you could but find some captain who would take me at once! One of my schoolfellows at Tours has been in the Mediterranean these two years: I should like to get out there. Do you happen to know any commander?"

"No, I am sorry to say I do not; but you have so many connexions."

"Oh, they are of no use! they have all quarrelled with us, or forgotten us."

Catherine affectionately sympathized with him, and it did him good. He left her, after half an hour's walk, with renovated spirits. But it proved, as she had feared, that his visit had not at all promoted his interest with his godmother.

"They may say what they please of him," said she, "but I maintain he's his father all over! Just

the same haughty spirit that must be my lord and master, come what will of it! Looked as fierce if I said a word that did not please him! And then, so unnaturally grave too—so unlike what a boy of his age should be, all fun and frolic! When he came I quite expected he would not leave me without something cracked or broken. I should not at all have grudged it; but he has no more notion of sport than a judge on the bench. He don't enter into it. Took him to see the clown's tricks of Astley's: laughed myself till I shook again; and there was he with just half a smile on his face!"

"In his present circumstances," Catherine replied, "one can hardly expect him to be very lively."

"Ah, well! all I know is," pettishly rejoined Miss Langley, "he's not at all one of my sort. I don't want to have any thing to do with unhappy people, be they men or women, boys or girls: give me those who can laugh and talk and make themselves pleasant company!"

The newly-married pair were not very long absent: within three weeks of the wedding-day

they took possession of a handsome house in Brook Street, and on the morrow dined at Lord Donnington's. The party was very small, including none but near relations. The ladies, when apart in the evening, laid ceremony aside; the Marchioness talked confidentially to her sister; Lady Arabella reclined half slumbering in a luxurious *fauteuil*—arrangements which might not be very complimentary to the bride, but which were particularly agreeable to her inclinations. Catherine was at the farther end of the room, busied in arranging some work for Lady Donnington, and to her Lady Emma gladly repaired.

"I have been so wishing," said she, "to hear about your friends the Falconbridges. I have thought of them more than ever lately, dreamed of them sometimes very dismally: do tell me all you know!"

Thus urged, Catherine gave a succinct account of her recent intercourse with the family. Never did melancholy tale more powerfully awaken the interest of the hearer. With lively compassion Lady Emma inquired how each individual of the family bore their common misfortune. "Poor

man!" said she, when Catherine owned that the Colonel had been much excited: "who can wonder? They say he is naturally irritable, and it was such a disappointment!"

But when her continued questioning drew forth the present state of the family, tears of the deepest sympathy filled the eyes of the new-made wife.

"Could he really leave her in such distress? Unfortunate woman, this is too much to be borne! Something must be found for him; he must be brought back to them. The Duke of Delaval is very powerful. I must speak to Lord Henry: but go on now; I want to know what is to become of the poor boy."

This inquiry led at once to Langley's present wish. Catherine had had scruples with regard to some part of the history, but there could be no reason for withholding this. Lady Emma caught eagerly at the idea.

"Does he really wish to enter the Navy? That is very fortunate, for there we can certainly serve him. Lord Henry's cousin, Captain Beauchamp, who is, they say, one of the kindest-hearted men in the service, is just appointed to the "Alcyone,"

on the Mediterranean station; he may have a vacancy still. We will ask; no time shall be lost —I am so glad you mentioned it to me!"

She looked eagerly for her husband's entrance; but when he came he did not join her. The time when she could claim his immediate attention was already past. She could not forbear a sigh for the sweet liberty of Fordinghame, where each thought as it arose in her mind was instantly communicated to his. But a fair opportunity for separate discourse soon occurred. The "Memorials of the House of Vere" were produced; the Marquis summoned his guests by general invitation to partake of this choice literary entertainment; but his granddaughter's spouse did not hesitate to excuse himself on the plea of having been already so regaled, and she hastened to profit by the chance.

"Make room for me!" said she, approaching the couch which in his attitude of careless ease he almost entirely occupied. And he did so willingly; for, though dreading to incur the ridicule of being too fond a husband, their accidental freedom was as welcome to him as to her.

"I am glad they are all engaged," said she; "I was so anxious to tell you what I have just heard from Miss Mansfield. She gives the most deplorable account of your rivals the Falconbridges——"

"Rivals!" interrupted Lord Henry, with a strong emphasis of alarm.

"Only a mistake—predecessors was what I meant. They are in a miserable state; the Colonel, half frantic, has suddenly quitted his wife——"

"Has he?" replied Lord Henry: "a strange act, cruel and unmanly!"

And he looked at his bride as he spoke with an expression which for an instant broke the thread of her narrative—absorbed in the sense of her own great happiness, she lost the recollection of another's woe.

"What was I about to say?" said she, awakening from her trance. "Oh, it was that being, as you are, especially bound to do all you can for this unhappy family——"

"*I* especially bound, my dear!"

"Why, surely you are! Having risen upon

their ruin, though not by any fault of yours, it is no more than justice that you should be ready to help them whenever you can."

He looked hardly half persuaded. "It is certainly a great stretch of the term 'justice;' but if for the sake of argument I admit the obligation, in what manner is it to be fulfilled? What can I do in their behalf?"

"A great deal: you can use your influence with your brother to procure this unfortunate man a good place."

"Falconbridge! an inveterate opponent!" exclaimed Lord Henry, in extreme astonishment.

"Ah, true! I forgot those unfortunate political distinctions."

"But *we* cannot forget them. Place on our side is out of the question, if he would accept it, which he undoubtedly would not. Nor would it help him: his embarrassments are far beyond what any official income would cover."

"Then, as you make it out, nothing can be done for him? If some one else would but make a will in their favour!"

"Nothing can be more desirable; I heartily

wish them success with any old lady they can find, one only excepted."

Lady Emma was pained by his manner.

"You do not treat this matter quite as I like," said she.

"No! why what would you have me say?"

"I would have you really sorry for them."

"And so I am, I assure you; but I can render them no help."

"Yes, you can. If you can do nothing for the Colonel personally, you can serve his son, his only child, who wishes to enter the Navy: you can ask Captain Beauchamp to take him at once."

"Charles is at Portsmouth," was the laconic reply.

"But he has not sailed; he will return to take leave of his family."

"Why, yes; I believe Mrs. Beauchamp did say she hoped to have another glimpse of him. But it is a hundred to one if I see him again."

"But you can write."

"No; that I must decline. A verbal request is all very well; but the matter hardly seems worth writing about."

"How many objections you raise! I shall be obliged to take the solicitation on myself."

"By all means, if you really wish to succeed."

"I was not serious," she hastily replied.

"But I am perfectly," he answered: "your intercession would be far more effective than mine."

"I wish it to be your act," she said, earnestly.

"Why, so it will in one sense. The marriage contract, as I understood it, made all our proceedings common. Did you interpret it differently?"

The playful expression which accompanied these last words changed into one of a rather graver cast, as he added, "The truth is, you want to invest me with undue credit in this affair. This I cannot allow: you must appear personally as the patroness of young Mr. Falconbridge. I will answer for your success with Charles: if he does not happen to have a vacancy, you may depend on his creating one by throwing a youngster overboard."

This conversation, while passing, had not been entirely satisfactory to Lady Emma; but at its conclusion she remained persuaded of her hus-

band's entire sympathy with her feelings, and assured Catherine that Langley might depend on immediately obtaining what he desired. The latter accordingly wrote at once to Mrs. Falconbridge, that the summoning away her son might not come upon her as a sudden blow.

On inquiry that evening, Lady Emma found that Captain Beauchamp was expected for his hasty farewell early next day: her first morning care, therefore, was to send a note to his house. Once more she endeavoured to persuade her husband to undertake the solicitation; but the answer was still a gentle but decided negative. She began to write accordingly, but soon threw away the sheet as too formal; then another, because she feared she had erred a little on the opposite side; and before she had made much progress with a third Lord Henry entered the room, fully prepared for Ascot.

"What! not ready yet?" he exclaimed: "the horses are waiting."

"I shall have finished presently," she pleaded; "do give me a few moments!"

He assented; but, by standing beside her, very

much impeded her progress. She had not been wife long enough to be perfectly easy under this inspection.

"Do leave me, dear Henry!" she said, imploringly: "I am not used to being overlooked while I am writing; it quite puts me out."

"A most unreasonable complaint! you could not have written more persuasively. Charles must have a heart of adamant to say 'No.'"

"Then I am sure I have said something quite ridiculous!" she cried. "I cannot, and will not write with you beside me!"

A playful dispute, in which the importance of the question itself was nearly forgotten, ended in locking up the note, to be concluded on her return.

Both enjoyed the exhilarating spectacle the more from its being the occasion of their first public appearance. He, however keenly he partook in the common excitement, was yet not unobservant of many admiring glances directed towards his bride; and she—what was her pride and joy in owning his name?

The evening course of engagements possessed for them the same special sense of enjoyment.

That very room which Lady Emma now entered in happy confidence, leaning on her husband's arm, had been the scene of an agitating incident during last season's unavowed attachment. Fondly did she recall the whole circumstance; and if his memory were not so minutely retentive, the traces were not effaced. The past was precious—never to be wholly forgotten.

Was it wonderful that at the close of such a day the petition to Captain Beauchamp was forgotten? But it was Lady Emma's first recollection on awaking, and under the impulse of lively compunction was soon finished and despatched. A prompt answer was returned by Mrs. Beauchamp: her husband had just set off, to sail immediately. It was much to be regretted the application had not come a little earlier; he had delayed to the utmost point the filling up his last vacancy, not liking the boy for whom it was asked.

Lady Emma descended to breakfast with this reply in her hand, and its vexatious contents very legibly transcribed on her countenance. The novelty of sadness did but invest her with fresh

charms in her husband's eyes; but he endeavoured to dissipate the feeling. She had no cause for self-reproach, he insisted; it was but an unfortunate mischance.

"No," she replied: "it was an inexcusable forgetfulness."

"You will profit by experience then, and have a better chance of success on the next occasion."

"None such is likely to occur. I consider every thing relating to patronage to be entirely a manly privilege."

"It is one, my dear, which you would be little disposed to envy us, if you better knew what it is. No man in office can satisfy the twentieth part of the demands made upon him. Their friends come in for no small share of solicitation. Here is a case in point, an urgent appeal for my interest with Delaval as a governor of the Charterhouse, the third I have had within as many months."

Lady Emma took the letter and read it.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked. "It seems an interesting case, a widow with four boys unprovided for."

"Really, I can do little or nothing. I will put

it into Delaval's hand; but I know no more of the parties than he does. Some one in the neighbourhood of Bleakmoor undertakes to interest himself in the matter; that is all I have to say. These claims are built on the slightest possible foundation."

"That is distressing! there must surely be great need to induce people to try such chances."

"No doubt there is," replied the young nobleman, tranquilly taking his place at his own richly-furnished board: "the country labours under the evils of a superabundant population: all professions and employments are overstocked."

"How melancholy!" rejoined his wife: "so many persons struggling together for subsistence! This poor lady, perhaps, depends a little on the hope of your interest. But *this* letter,"—looking again at Mrs. Beauchamp's,—"it does so grieve me! Not to have rendered them even this single trifling service! And all from delay in making the matter known."

"My dear, you take this matter much too seriously. It is impossible that the Falconbridges can be so destitute of friends and interest; they

cannot stand in need of help from us. Depend upon it, if their son really wishes to enter the Navy, he will readily find admission."

She was but imperfectly consoled, but would not annoy him with further self-accusing.

Catherine was also much concerned at the issue of the affair; but there was comfort in Mrs. Falconbridge's reply:—

"The first art to be acquired in life is that of bearing disappointment. Langley, I am happy to say, endures this preliminary proof tolerably well: and for myself, now it is all over, I am free to confess that I dreaded parting with him. At some future time I hope to be as heroic in feeling as I would really have been in act; but as yet I am hardly equal to it[1]."

[1] To meet a probable objection that the Naval Service cannot be entered in the summary manner here proposed, without previous training, the author must observe that the date of the story is not precisely that of the present day. At a period not yet very remote the commander of a vessel certainly did possess the privilege here ascribed to him.

CHAPTER XX.

MISS LANGLEY, though she continued to declare that London did not agree with her, took a house for the remainder of the season in Park Lane. The young husband and wife soon found that they must not expect to enjoy her favour free of charge. Not content with assuming it to be her right to "come in in a friendly way" at all hours of the day, she was immoderately anxious to accompany them into society. The fact was, that in the decline of her naturally boisterous gaiety factitious pleasures had become essential to her being. Hitherto she had never spent much time in London: not liking to find herself but one among the wealthy classes, she soon returned with eagerness to queen it at her

fine estate. But she now expected to find in a total change of habits the renovation of her decaying sense of enjoyment. To be admitted to share in the dissipations of the highest circles, and dazzle them with her magnificence, would, she imagined, supply the void of which she was conscious without knowing the cause. This novel passion was somewhat inconvenient to those on whom she depended for introduction. Lord Henry, having by no means forgotten the serious embarrassments from which her partiality had relieved him, was prepared to bear all such exactions philosophically; but Lady Emma would now and then indulge in a little complaint.

"Really," said she to Catherine, "this insatiable ardour for *fêtes* is most unfortunate; every day brings a fresh demand. She is not aware that to be on visiting terms does not always imply a right to introduce others. Many persons, our own relations included, would be extremely surprised at our taking that liberty. I assure you, I have already extended my interest as far as is at all allowable. She went with us to Dromore House last night. My sister-in-law, to oblige me,

kindly procured her an invitation. But it has not contented her. I find her this morning most childishly eager to be at Lady Bellasis's party at Roehampton. I see plainly she will take no denial; yet it really is a most inconvenient fancy. There will not be a great number present, so that her peculiarities will be the more remarked. As it happens, too, Lady Bellasis and her daughter are persons I do not particularly like. I am not at all desirous of incurring any obligation to them; yet I must, I suppose, set every engine to work to gratify this new whim."

She did so accordingly, and with success. Miss Langley's name figured among a dozen or two, recorded in a morning paper as having attended this "very select" party, as the phrase went; and this distinction having facilitated her entrance into some other great houses, it might be reasonably hoped that her ambition would be fully satisfied. But desires of this kind are apt to multiply the faster for being indulged. The latest drawing-room of the season was at hand. Lady Emma was to be presented on her marriage; and Miss Langley became persuaded that it would be ex-

pedient for her also to make a first appearance, under the auspices of the Duchess of Ilminster. To bring this to pass was a harder task than any Lady Emma had yet undertaken, and she anticipated the occasion with great uneasiness.

"Poor deluded old lady!" said she, "what a pity it is that she cannot see how entirely it is out of date! To be presented at her age! How far happier and more respected she would be settled quietly at home again!"

The appointed day came. Catherine, as she sat at work, was regretting that, having no pretence for calling in Brook Street that morning, she should not see Lady Emma arrayed for bridal presentation, when, much to her surprise, her Ladyship entered the room, her countenance betraying, perhaps, a little innocent consciousness that she looked to peculiar advantage, but blended with a more decidedly marked expression of perturbation.

"Oh, Miss Mansfield," said she, "I am in such perplexity! Would you believe it? just as they were finishing my hair comes a note from the Duchess, desiring me to make her excuses to

Miss Langley for declining to present her! Only imagine it! What can I say to pacify her? A point on which her heart is so much set—and the disappointment to come from my own near relation too! I really am quite frightened at the thought of telling her. I am sure, though usually good-humoured, she can be violent when offended: and indeed such an affront would irritate the mildest temper. How can my aunt act so strangely? It is, I must say, very unkind to me also."

"What does Lord Henry say to it?"

"He knows nothing of it yet; he is not at home; and I grew so impatient that I was obliged to come to you."

"Can you not ask some other friend?"

"No; her name was given in as to be presented by the Duchess, and I suppose no alteration is allowable. Besides, if it were, nothing could excuse my aunt's conduct! In short, without you I dare not face her; you must accompany me to her house."

"If the Marchioness——"

"Oh, never mind the Marchioness! I will

take that upon myself. You really must come! I will soon bring you back."

They set off accordingly; and in their short transit from one house to the other Lady Emma hurriedly explained what she believed to be the cause of her present awkward predicament.

"Most unwisely, as it has proved, we asked them to meet at dinner yesterday. It was with a view of putting them more at ease; instead of which, it was the cause I am convinced of my aunt's breaking her promise, though she does not trouble herself to assign any motive. There was some talking about jewels: Lady Tynedale's were mentioned as superb. I knew the Duchess would not be pleased. There is a little rivalry in that quarter; but of course she showed no concern about it. Not so poor Miss Langley: her vanity was piqued, and she actually told us how much her own were worth! I was so ashamed for her; and I know it mortified Henry too: these things do, though he does not let it appear. As for the Duchess, no wonder she was disgusted; but for my sake she surely might have disregarded it. Some fear of being eclipsed, I can hardly doubt.—

Here we are already! and my heart does so beat! Her carriage is driving off! what can be the meaning of that? Does she know it now? If so, I might have spared myself these tremors. Yet the footmen still stand at the door! What does it all mean?"

The strange symptoms were soon explained. A frightful occurrence had rendered all preparations vain. In the fatiguing process of dressing, Miss Langley had sunk down senseless: the physicians at once pronounced it a paralytic seizure.

Lady Emma was chilled with horror. Catherine, seeing how deeply she was affected, urged her returning home immediately.

"No," she answered, in a faint voice; "I will go in. I want to inquire more particularly."

They entered the house, and, finding no one capable of giving much information, went upstairs. When they drew near the sufferer's chamber Catherine again remonstrated, and Lady Emma consented to remain in the adjoining dressing-room. It gave mournful tokens of what had passed there: jewels, feathers, lace were scattered on all sides; robes of costly fabric lay actually on the floor,

evidently torn off the prostrate wearer. In the next room all was awfully still. Was it the very silence of death? By a strange impulse Lady Emma opened the door, which Catherine on leaving her had carefully closed. The whole spectacle was at once before her: the bed in full view; two physicians standing beside it, gravely intent upon their duty; the women around with faces marked with consternation; the outstretched figure itself, still partially clad in rich garments, contrasting appallingly with the livid hue, the distorted features, the rigid attitude! A piercing hysterical shriek startled the attendants, apprising them of Lady Emma's imprudent intrusion. Catherine hastened to her aid. The attack was long as well as violent; it had not entirely subsided when word was brought that the Duchess of Ilminster was at the door.

According to rule, the office of presenting her new-made sister-in-law belonged to the Duchess of Delaval; but the latter was unable to fulfil it, having just rendered the family a different service —that of adding to it a seventh son—and it had therefore been delegated to her Grace of Ilminster,

who claimed near kindred with the Beauchamps. Much annoyed by not seeing her niece at the appointed hour, the Duchess drove to Brook Street, thence to Grosvenor Square, and finally, though with much reluctance, even to Park Lane. As her inquiries there respected only Lady Emma, the domestics did not think it necessary to communicate what had befallen their mistress, and her Grace was consequently really conscience-struck at the lamentable state in which her niece at length appeared—her beauty disfigured, her attire disarranged.

"My dear Emma," she exclaimed, "I am really quite concerned! she must have been actually outrageous!"

"Oh, no!" answered Lady Emma, sinking back in the carriage. "Poor woman! so shockingly ill!"

"Who? Miss Langley?" eagerly asked the Duchess.

"She lies paralyzed, like one dead!" replied Lady Emma, shuddering violently at the recollection. A severe return of hysterical affection followed. The Duchess, seeing it impossible to

proceed at once to the palace, returned to her own house.

"How came you to see this shocking sight, my dear?" said her Grace, in her tenderest tones. "What induced you to go there?"

"The note you sent me: I went with Miss Mansfield——"

"Miss Mansfield was with you, and did not prevent this imprudence! Now, upon my word, I am astonished at her! Henry will be seriously angry: he has a right to be so."

"No, indeed; no one was at all to blame; it was entirely my own act. But it was so terrible! her whole figure stiffened, her face so ghastly!"

"A deplorable sight, no doubt. Persons in such a state never should be seen but by those who cannot help it. That fine feather, Josephine, is quite displaced; see if you can readjust it. Such an unfortunate occurrence to-day!"

"What are you doing, Josephine?" said Lady Emma, twisting her head from the hands of the waiting-woman. "It is of no use to touch my head-dress; I am not going—I cannot."

"But you must, my dear! You know it is now

or never: there will not be another opportunity this year."

"Well, then, I can wait till the next."

"Not so well. A bridal presentation should not be deferred, unless there is some real impediment."

The *femme-de-chambre*, acting upon her lady's authority, still continued her dexterous operations, notwithstanding the plaintive remonstrances of Lady Emma. The Duchess at length thought it necessary to administer a gentle rebuke, "My dear, *I* can quite understand all this, but others may not. Do not carry it too far!"

"What can you mean?" asked Lady Emma, utterly perplexed.

"Why, *mon enfant*, you are so simple-minded! One must always be so plain with you: most people would understand readily enough. This event, no doubt, is shocking at the moment, but its consequences——"

"Oh, don't talk of that *now!*" interrupted Lady Emma.

"Well, well! the present concern is to repair this damage: it is getting terribly late! I am sadly vexed; every thing has gone wrong to-day!"

Lady Emma was still inclined to resist.

"Must I undergo all this fatigue again?" said she: "it is really very hard! What does my going signify? who will know whether I am there or not?"

"What a question! your absence will be universally remarked. And what will Henry say to it?"

Her Grace had here, almost unconsciously—so little did she understand the mechanism of her niece's heart—touched the only chord available for her purpose. At the suggestion of her husband's interest in the question, Lady Emma without further opposition submitted her still aching head to the tire-woman's hands. The Duchess watched the proceedings with the liveliest interest.

"Admirable!" she exclaimed: "it is improvement rather than reparation. But, Josephine——"

A look exchanged with the handmaid intimated clearly enough what passed in the minds of each. With all the latter's proficiency in her art, neither she nor her mistress could fail to perceive that something was wanting: Lady Emma's complexion was not so truly that of the "blended

roses" as was its wont; how indeed could it be, bedewed as it had been by that unseasonable shower of tears? There were among the appliances of the toilet certain mysterious cosmetics—should these be called into requisition? The Duchess decided the question by a negative movement of the head.

"The improvement would be manifest," she murmured; "but better not, perhaps."

Meantime her niece, entirely unconscious of this little by-consultation, supported her head with one hand, while she employed the other in modifying Mademoiselle's arrangements according to her own taste. Before all was completed the Duchess was informed that Lord Henry wished to see her. She went immediately, not sorry to be the bearer of important tidings. His first expressions were those of surprise and commiseration: she replied with a few commonplaces of the same kind. But then the features of the heir-expectant were crossed by a shade which, in pity to the weakness of humanity, it might have been as well not to peruse too clearly. The Duchess had no such scruples.

"A critical moment for you," she quietly observed: "you must feel extremely anxious."

"Why," he replied, "it is impossible altogether to exclude such considerations. The attack, however, may not be fatal."

The Duchess shook her majestic head, with its towering superstructure: the gesture might pass for despondency or the reverse, according as the spectator chose to interpret it.

"From Emma's account I should conclude the symptoms to be of the most serious description. The poor woman is undoubtedly a very bad subject: one cannot but see what her habits of living have been; and then her age!"

Lord Henry was silent: there might be thoughts he desired to conceal at least, if not to control; but the Duchess spoke to them.

"I can entirely sympathize with you—you have had a great deal to endure. I really wondered how you contrived to support it with so much apparent ease! and, for my part, I was never without the apprehension of a cruel disappointment: the whole affair was so strange, so much the result of caprice! For your sake and dear

Emma's, a speedy termination of these anxieties cannot but be felt as satisfactory."

The object of this kind sympathy could hardly feel equal confidence as to his position. "People often rally wonderfully in such cases," he observed.

As he spoke a hand was gently laid on his arm, with the simple words, "Is not this shocking news, Henry?" His wife had entered unperceived. He could not answer: she evidently gave him credit for a compassion as pure as her own.

"You look ill yourself," he said, tenderly: "the scene must have been too distressing for you to witness."

"Certainly it was," interposed the Duchess. "Miss Mansfield was much to blame! we are to thank her, it seems, for this very inconvenient delay."

A faint flush tinged Lady Emma's cheek as she said, "How can you, my dear Aunt, persist in blaming any one for an act which was so entirely my own? Nor was it the seeing only which so overcame me: the mere fact was dreadful! To be seized with death at such a moment!"

The Duchess in visible irritation walked from one window to another.

"The Rochforts come back!" she exclaimed; "the Mordants too—and here comes Lady Belmont! My dear friends, let us come to an understanding at once—are you for the palace, or not?"

Lady Emma looked to her husband for the answer.

"Decide yourself," he said: "are you equal to the fatigue?"

"Yes, I am now; but do you think we ought to go under these circumstances?"

The scruple had not occurred to either of those to whom it was submitted, but it could not be disregarded. A question of propriety had always its due weight with her Grace.

"Undoubtedly," said she, "any thing like disrespect must be avoided. But just at present the thing can hardly be known. Much depends upon the difference of a few hours. Your friend Lady Scudamore"—addressing herself to Lord Henry—"certainly did present a daughter after her sister's death without creating scandal: it

was presumed the news had not then arrived. And in this case, the invalid being after all wholly unconnected with you, I really see nothing at all against it."

Husband and wife deferred to her judgment; all three descended the staircase together. Lord Henry expressed a natural regret on the occasion.

"I could have wished she had looked as when she went to dress."

"Oh, nothing could be more unfortunate!" said the Duchess; "though Josephine has effected marvels. Too much feeling—too much! it is the bane of our race! If it had but happened another day! The Launcestons to-night—*that* must be given up. However, regret is unavailing —to the palace, as fast as possible!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CONTRARY to all expectation, Lord Henry's perhaps excepted, Miss Langley's attack, severe as it was, did not prove fatal. She rallied in a manner that not only set at naught the hasty conclusions of the unlearned, but baffled the judgment of the most experienced professors of medical science. Her physical powers were soon in a great measure restored: she could walk, though feebly; nor were the faculties of sight and hearing much impaired. The marked change was in her state of mind. She regarded the vanities with which she had been so eagerly occupied at the moment of her seizure with absolute repugnance: whatever reminded her of them was a cause of offence. But though thus

disgusted with the past, her mind aspired not to the higher objects of futurity. She fell into an utterly deplorable condition—dead to all earthly enjoyment, yet shrinking with all her former terror from the contemplation of that other world whose confines she approached.

The Duchess of Ilminster, though her prognostications had not been fully verified, saw much subject for congratulation in the actual position of affairs.

"At all events," said she to Lord Henry, "you have no longer to dread any capricious revocation. Secluded as she now is, and no doubt must be for the remainder of her days, she is entirely out of the reach of designing persons."

He shook his head. "I fear this view of the case is a little too flattering: my hold on her regard is greatly weakened. Whilst she continued in health I contributed to her gratification in various ways: that is now completely over; nothing seems to afford her any kind of amusement."

The Duchess looked rather gravely on this report.

"You do not neglect to visit her, I hope? Persons near their end are often so suspicious, and *so* resentful! I have known such instances!"

"I am well aware of the danger; but it certainly is a mortifying position. Ward tells me she may, not improbably, linger in this miserable condition for months to come; and here we are within a fortnight of August!"

"Annoying indeed! As for the poor invalid herself, nothing can be more desirable than her speedy release."

"That is my opinion, undoubtedly. The dregs of existence do not seem to me worth the draining."

"Ah, no, surely not," answered her Grace, with soft pathos. "But I really am most anxious for you. Is there any thing I can do? I send every day the most particular inquiries; but I could go even to the extent of a personal call to serve you at this juncture."

"I am deeply obliged; but, to speak frankly, I should rather apprehend a contrary effect. Why it is, I leave to the faculty to explain; but she now displays extreme acuteness in distinguishing the

motives of those who approach her, and could hardly fail to perceive whence such condescension must proceed."

The Duchess was obviously piqued by the rejection of her gracious offer.

"As you please," she replied. "I can of course have no object but to benefit you and Emma."

"Exactly what she would detect," he answered, with a slight bow of grateful acknowledgment, as he rose to leave her.

The Duchess recovered her temper enough to ask, "What sort of people has she about her?"

"In the first place, a favourite waiting-maid——"

"Ah, that is dangerous!" interrupted her Grace, with renewed interest. "A woman of that class is likely to have complete ascendancy over one really not much above herself, wealth alone excepted."

"I am far from easy on that point. The worthy woman, I must own, seems to have no view to personal profit; but she is devoted to the interests of the former legatee, Mrs. Falconbridge. Then there is another inmate of higher degree, said

to be nearly related to the all-accomplished Sophia——"

Engrossed by his own affairs, Lord Henry had here incautiously touched on a theme entirely tabooed by his auditor. A bright flash from the Duchess's eyes instantly reminded him of his indiscretion; but, mollified by his evident confusion, she generously forbore to notice it otherwise than by the marked dignity with which she answered, "I know the person in question: you cannot be too much on your guard against her—she is a systematic schemer."

"I had exactly that impression of her character. Hitherto she has affected to be my warmest friend, but I never relied on her sincerity."

The impressive warning he had received a good deal augmented Lord Henry's alarm; but, in truth, he stood in no danger from Miss Lisle, too wise ever to grasp at any object above her reach. She perfectly understood the nature with which she had to deal. Miss Langley, she saw, would never bequeath her wealth to any one who could not give her some kind of equivalent whilst she lived; and conscious of possessing neither

sprightliness nor consequence enough for this kind of barter, she limited her views to being now an habitual inmate of a luxurious dwelling, and obtaining, perhaps, some small remembrance hereafter. But this sudden illness had entirely broken her measures: she found her position in the house to be of a very uncertain tenure. Marshall, who as a matter of course assumed the direction of affairs, showed the strongest disposition summarily to eject her; and daily dissensions arose concerning articles of trifling value which, hopeless now of greater spoil, she attempted to appropriate, on pretence of some promise from their scarcely conscious owner. Catherine was the sole mediatrix to whom the disputants could appeal: it was hers to moderate the honest indignation of the one, and impose some check on the rapacity of the other. Her frequent presence in the house was in consequence of the express desire of Miss Langley, whose first intelligible syllables had been, "Send for Miss Mansfield." The Marchioness was not much inclined to allow this claim on her companion's time, but her lord, who, with all his pride of ancestry, was never careless of pecuniary conside-

rations, insisted that nothing should be hazarded in a case of such importance to his granddaughter and her heirs. Marshall welcomed Catherine most cordially. Desperate as the case appeared, she had never abandoned the hope of reinstating Mrs. Falconbridge in her mistress's favour, and doubted not to find here a most valuable ally. Hints to this effect were continually thrown out. One day it was, "You'll find my mistress quite herself this morning, able to talk over old times." Another time still more pointedly, "If I may make so bold as to advise, Miss Mansfield, don't say any thing about the Colonel, poor man! nor even about Master Langley; but keep on talking about the dear good lady herself, and the time when she was so young and beautiful, and the merry doings there used to be at Beechwood. That's the way to touch her, to my mind."

Catherine much feared that her friend would be only the farther removed from any chance of benefit by these zealous endeavours on her behalf. But, however that might prove, she could not have thought herself justified in seeking to persuade one in so shattered a condition to alter

a deed executed when her faculties were still unimpaired, even had she not been bound in honour to the Donnington family to do nothing prejudicial to their interests. The attendant, at length, finding her importunate suggestions disregarded, anathematized Catherine as a monster of selfish ingratitude, abandoning her earliest and best friends that she "might keep on good terms with these Beauchamps."

For this disappointment she was partly consoled by seeing her mistress's advancement in convalescence marked by an increasing dislike to the assiduities of Miss Lisle. The latter took with her accustomed servility much rude treatment; but it became at last more than even she could endure. She found herself compelled to return to a very humble dwelling, carrying with her the due penalty of her despicable conduct—a vain pining after luxuries beyond her own means of command.

This departure, or rather expulsion, was not altogether so satisfactory to Lord Henry as to Marshall. The removal of one cause of apprehension made him doubly impatient of the trouble

of guarding against the other. His daily visits to the invalid seemed to him by so much the more burdensome as they were now less necessary. Whenever they happened to interfere with more agreeable arrangements he murmured loudly at the hardship. It happened one morning that his temper underwent a particularly trying proof of this kind. An Italian nobleman came to request his opinion concerning a stud he was about to transport to his own country. Flattered by the appeal, he assented with alacrity, and was on the point of setting out, when he remembered a less welcome call. An expression of extreme vexation clouded his countenance, and turning to his wife,—

"Really," he said, "this obligation becomes intolerably irksome! be the consequences what they may, I shall not be able to endure it much longer."

Lady Emma was eager in sympathy.

"Surely your absence might be excused: you need not be there now. At least, I will go at once: you can follow when you please."

He scrupled to accept this disinterested offer.

"It would be too hard upon you, my dear; a

two hours' *tête-à-tête*—no, I could not condemn you to such a penance!"

"How can it be a penance to me to afford you an opportunity of doing what you like?"

The foreign stranger, wholly unskilled as he was in the English language, guessed something of the import of these words from the accompanying expression: Lord Henry was touched by their simple truth.

"You tempt me strongly," he said. "It will be but for once. As for the poor old lady herself, she can have no cause to complain, having in you very far better society. Count, I am entirely at your service."

Lady Emma's message of excuse in behalf of her absent lord was as pleasingly worded, and, what was better, kept as near the exact truth as the nature of the case admitted; but it did not preserve her from a good deal of mortification. She had not only to hear the deep growling "Indeed!" which signified Miss Langley's own disbelief of the statement, but to see the contemptuous jerk with which the attendant testified a like incredulity. But she soon pacified the

former's displeasure. After the first few moments Miss Langley seemed to agree with Lord Henry in holding his wife's companionship a sufficient substitute for his own. He did not join her there, as she had hoped he would, but on seeing her at home thanked her warmly for the pleasure her self-sacrifice had procured him.

On the following day they went together; but when he had assisted her to alight she was surprised to see him in the act of remounting.

"Are you not coming in?" she asked.

"Not just yet," he answered, as he again took the reins: "I really think you will get on better without me. Amuse her till I come: I shall look in by-and-by."

He drove off rapidly: she walked very slowly into the house. The promised "looking in" turned out to be no more than calling to take her away; but he was in high spirits, and she did not tax him with not having kept his promise. But on the morrow things came to a crisis: Lord Henry dropped some expressions which clearly intimated that he now considered himself completely released from a disagreeable duty. Lady

Emma took no apparent notice of his words, and he continued writing, totally unaware of the effect they had produced on her. She was plunged in strange and painful musings. Would he grow more and more willing to sacrifice her comfort to his own? Would he become altogether indifferent as to whether she were pleased or not? She had been told of wives, now wholly estranged from their husbands, who once had been as confidingly happy as herself. Fancy all too readily pictured Lord Henry thus alienated; but she could not imagine herself becalmed into the tranquillity with which these neglected spouses seemed generally to have reconciled themselves to their fate. No; his affections lost, she should have no further joy in mortal being! Her perfect stillness while absorbed in this melancholy reverie at length attracted his attention: looking up from his writing, he discerned the glistening of tears on her eyelids, and was instantly beside her. But she covered her face with her hands, and attempted to withdraw from him.

"My own Emma! what can this mean?"

His tone of anxious surprise at once overcame

her: she clung to him, weeping unrestrainedly. He could obtain only broken negatives to the inquiries with which he pressed her. Was she ill? unhappy? "No—no!" in half-suffocated tones. He made every possible effort to penetrate the mystery, urging her both playfully and seriously; but in vain. The more tender his manner became the more profoundly contrite was she. What could be more natural than that he, man as he was, should have become almost incapable of continued attendance in the sick-chamber of an old and irritable woman? What should have been more grateful to her heart than his reliance on her own professed willingness to relieve him of the charge? All the error seemed to her to have been on her own side—all her dread was lest he should divine her injurious, wild imaginings.

"It is nothing, dear Henry: only forgive me!"

"Forgive? for what possible wrong?"

It was vain to ask—he did but increase the agitation he wished to compose. He gave it up at last as one of the inexplicable mysteries of feminine feeling, leaving her in thankful possession of what she now coveted as a precious privilege.

CHAPTER XXII.

LADY EMMA soon acquired a new interest in the task she had undertaken. When she accompanied her husband he had really been the chief object of her sympathies. The weariness with which she knew him to be acting his part so preoccupied her attention that she had little to spare for her whom they came to see. Now, only, did she begin to experience in full force the single sentiment of pity. Few sufferers could be less personally interesting, yet the constant contemplation of her state of depression soon inspired Lady Emma with a lively sense of pleasure in ministering to her relief. She accommodated herself with admirable facility to a temper now become exceedingly capricious

and perverse. The dying often cherish for those who succour them a warmth of regard beyond their nature when in health and strength. It was thus especially with Miss Langley. The coming of her young visitant was the single point of time she noted with pleasure. Gratified to see this, Lady Emma came more frequently, and without regard to stated hours. It happened that a private Bill, affecting the interests of the house of Delaval, was now in progress through the Commons, and Lord Henry was in consequence more than usually punctual in attendance. The time he spent thus Lady Emma devoted entirely to her charitable offices in Park Lane. One evening she found Miss Langley engaged in examining her jewel-casket. Marshall, who was in attendance, was more than usually unpleasant in manner, and seemed exceedingly desirous that the inspection should be brought to an end. She was closing a case when her mistress interposed with, "Stay, Marshall, those are the diamonds: Lady Emma has not seen them at all."

"Oh, yes, I have, thank you: they are most superb!"

"You shall see them better. Take them out again, Marshall, I desire you."

"Dear me, ma'am! when her Ladyship herself says she's seen enough of them!"

"No matter. I order you to open that case again," was reiterated, in a tone that admitted not of further dispute. The diamonds were extremely magnificent: Lady Emma repeatedly expressed her admiration.

"I am glad you like them," said Miss Langley, shortly: "they're to come to you."

Lady Emma took no notice of this remark, which she supposed to mean only that the jewels, with the rest of the owner's property, had been bequeathed to Lord Henry. An irritable expression of countenance betokened that something was going wrong.

"Didn't you hear me say I meant those things for you?" asked Miss Langley, with asperity.

"You mean as my husband's?" said Lady Emma, gently.

"No, I don't. I mean yours—yours alone: I love you!"

"You are very kind; but don't trouble yourself

with thinking about such things! Whatever is his is mine also, you know."

"May be so; but I shall leave them to you yourself. Stand up: I want to see how they look upon you."

Lady Emma arose accordingly; but few of her age could have surveyed such splendid ornaments as soon to be her own with so moderate a sense of gratification. Some of them she remembered to have seen, worn by their present owner, at the moment when she lay as one apparently dead: the association of ideas was shocking to her feelings. But they must, no doubt, undergo an entire alteration to be adapted to her use, so great was the difference in size and figure.

"Put on the bracelets as armlets, Marshall," said her mistress: "that will show the effect just as well."

The waiting-maid obeyed, but so awkwardly as actually to pinch the arm with the clasp. Lady Emma started with the sharpness of the pain, but said nothing. Marshall's maladroitness in this office had, indeed, been singularly conspicuous:

in fastening the pendants she had somehow contrived to twitch the ears very disagreeably, and had pressed down the weighty tiara so as to make it at once as inconvenient and as unbecoming as possible. But, aware of the woman's inveterate aversion to her, Lady Emma forbore complaint, consoling herself with the hope of never again being so unskilfully attended. When the several ornaments were taken off, well pleased that the affair was concluded, she began to examine more minutely the beauty of some other articles lying on the table. Among these was the portrait of a boy about ten years old, set in the form of a brooch. She instantly guessed whom it represented.

"Is not this your godson, Colonel Falconbridge's son?"

Miss Langley just nodded an affirmative.

"What a fine open countenance!" pursued Lady Emma, contemplating it with admiration. "It was taken some years ago, I suppose? he is older now than he appears here."

Looking up as she spoke, she saw Miss Langley's head dropping heavily on one shoulder, and sat quietly beside her for some time, in a far from

pleasing reverie. It was broken by the earnest gestures of Marshall, evidently entreating to speak with her apart. Much surprised, she arose gently, and glided into an adjoining room, the door of which Marshall closed as she followed, her feelings being too strong to submit to the restraint of whispering.

"Oh, my Lady!" she immediately began, "I dare say you wonder at my taking such a liberty, but I *must* beg your pardon, ten thousand times, for the hurt I gave you just now."

"You mean the little pinch on my arm: never mind it, the pain was but momentary."

"Was it indeed? it was a sharp pinch, I'm sure; for you quite started under my hands. If your Ladyship would but let me look—I'm afraid it must have left a mark!"

Lady Emma smilingly complied, convinced that no trace of so slight an injury would be found. But it proved otherwise, the white smooth arm exhibited a small indenture which had evidently been produced in that manner. Marshall's remorse was really poignant: Lady Emma treated the matter as lightly as before.

"Never mind the mark," said she: "the pain, I assure you, is quite forgotten. Besides, after all, it was but an accident."

"No, my Lady, I can't pretend to say that it was quite a downright accident. I didn't mean to hurt you, exactly; but it was because I was so angry—my mistress had put me quite beside myself! And I don't know that I should be so sorry as I am now if you hadn't spoken so kindly about dear Master Langley."

"What had happened to provoke you so much?"

"Oh, my Lady, to hear her talk of giving those diamonds to you, when not ten minutes before she'd settled they should go to Mrs. Falconbridge! But that's the way with her now, poor soul! if you do get her right one moment, she's all round again like a weathercock the next!"

"Explain yourself, Marshall: let me know what you mean."

"Why, my Lady, being only we two together, I had got talking to her of old times, and of how poor Mrs. Falconbridge had nursed her through a bad illness that she had many years ago; and so at last I brought her to some kind of feeling,

and—I'm a witness to it—she said she would leave her those diamonds. Indeed, I was getting ready to have it all in black and white when your Ladyship came in; and then her mind changed, as it does now, all on a sudden, and she got it into her head that she must give them to you! There's no keeping her steady now five minutes together: you must take her when you can; and that's what I told Miss Mansfield the other day. But she took no manner of notice of it: she's turned quite against her old friends, like the rest of the world."

"No, no, Marshall; you must not think so. But these jewels—they must be of great value?"

"Sixty or seventy thousand pounds that set alone," was the answer, in sorrowful accents; "and that's a heavy loss to Mrs. Falconbridge. If she had them she wouldn't wear them now, but they would go to support her and the Colonel and young Master Langley in foreign parts again, may be."

With a heavy sigh Marshall now withdrew, and Lady Emma returned to the other apartment, deeply impressed by what she had heard. Its truth could not be doubted: the narrator's keen

disappointment, her transport of anger, sufficiently attested that such a design had been entertained, and frustrated only by her own unexpected entrance. She dwelt upon the thought, and formed her resolve, waiting anxiously till the invalid should shake off her present unhealthy torpor. This she soon did, and, favourably for her companion's purpose, in a clear state of mind.

"Have I been long asleep?" she asked.

"Not very long, only since I took up this picture: I am delighted with it—the countenance is so frank and intelligent, and so handsome, too! Is he not reckoned very like his mother?"

"I see no likeness," was the very cold reply.

"Well, then, it must be fancy, I suppose; but I imagined I could trace some likeness, as far as I recollect her. I saw her once in my childhood: perhaps you did not know that?"

This intimation failing to excite the slightest symptoms of interest, Lady Emma at once relinquished all attempts at ingenious circumlocution, wholly foreign to her natural disposition.

"May I ask," she somewhat abruptly began,

" whether you did not just now talk of bequeathing some of your jewels to me ?"

" Yes, I did ; and," added the testatrix, with a gruffness which might be fairly excused, " you won't have to wait long for them, either."

" Oh, you quite misunderstand !" said Lady Emma, colouring. " I thank you for the kindness, which in my surprise I think I hardly did ; but I understand you had previously determined to leave them to Mrs. Falconbridge, and——"

" There's Marshall again !" interrupted Miss Langley, with much irritation : " she worries me to death about those people ! I've done quite enough for them, and I'll do no more !"

" But what I have to explain," said Lady Emma, in her gentlest accents, " is that it will gratify me much more that you should adhere to your first intention. It so happens that I have no particular fancy for jewels ; and they will be so much better bestowed on Mrs. Falconbridge, really poor as I hear she now is."

" Very odd," muttered Miss Langley.

" Her case is so melancholy ; and I have heard so much in her praise !" persisted Lady Emma.

"Come, all is ready for drawing up the little deed: here am I for a witness, Marshall will find us another; all will be done in a few minutes without the least trouble."

While speaking thus she was already making the necessary arrangements. But Miss Langley was not so easily moved to action.

"Let me wait till morning, at least," she pleaded. "I can't write now, my hand shakes so. Morning will be quite time enough, if it must be done."

"I will guide your hand—I will keep it steady," eagerly rejoined Lady Emma; "and it is only a very few words you have to write."

A sheet of paper was accordingly placed before the sick woman, a pen put between her reluctant fingers; Marshall eagerly summoned an inferior servant to sign after Lady Emma, who was herself so deeply absorbed in her purpose that the entrance of her husband, though quite in the regular course of events, startled her as much as though she had beheld in him a spectral visitant. On his side Lord Henry was almost equally surprised, and by no means agreeably. To find

Miss Langley engaged in writing was what he neither expected nor desired. Having made a disposition entirely in his favour, any alteration must be more or less against him. Of late he had almost dismissed the apprehension of her doing any thing of the kind: her increasing apathy seemed to put it beyond all chance. And, certainly, the thing he least dreaded was to find his own wife enlisted among his opponents. Without hesitation he looked at the writing, and at once caught the ominous name of Falconbridge, traced in large, though irregular characters. He darted upon Lady Emma such a look as she had never before seen; a look which caused her to shrink abashed, as if detected in some flagrant act of delinquency, and hastily to tear the unfinished codicil. Miss Langley, without regret, gave up a task not willingly undertaken, making not the slightest remark on the subject. Lord Henry, aware that his interests were in some peril, though he knew not yet to what extent, exerted himself for her entertainment to the utmost, and succeeded so well that her spirits rose to a height unnatural in her present condition.

He remained till it became clear that the attempt he had interrupted could not be resumed that night. Seeing Miss Langley at last sinking into a state of lethargy, he consigned her to the care of the keenly disappointed Marshall, and departed. No sooner were they in the carriage than he hastened to express a deep sense of compunction for what had recently passed.

"I know I frightened you," he said, drawing his wife towards him.

"You did, I own. I never before saw you look angry."

"Nor shall you ever again!" he answered, fervently. His agitation and her own deprived her of the power of reply, but she contrived, nevertheless, to assure him of her full forgiveness. When he was again master of himself he thus resumed: "My only excuse is, my astonishment at finding you so engaged—assisting her to make a new will!"

"A will! oh, no!" she exclaimed, in surprise; "it was no more than a single codicil. Let me tell you how it was." She then gave him a simple account of the transaction. Much as he

disapproved her intentions, he was not a little touched by the recital.

"Then you do not now think I did any thing so very wrong?"

"You acted only too much like an angel!"

She smiled at his fond enthusiasm, and replied, "I think I only did what was natural. But it was unfortunate that you interrupted us just then. Another minute, and it would have been done!"

With a smile different in expression from hers, he answered, "I cannot share in that regret, I confess."

"Why, now that I have explained it all to you, you will not object, surely?" she said anxiously.

"No, to be sure; how can I be so unreasonable, now that I know it was only a question of some seventy thousand pounds? A mere *bagatelle!*"

She took his hand in hers as she replied, "Hear me seriously, dear Henry. I see now that I was in error. I imagined, when she spoke of leaving them to me, that I was at liberty to persuade her to dispose of them otherwise. It was wrong: I

should have waited for your sanction. But now let us consider the question together. The value of these jewels is great—but how little do we need them! You, about to possess an immense property—I, a large estate hereafter. To this unfortunate family such a bequest would be most important, it would extricate them from their present depth of distress."

Lord Henry listened with a troubled brow to these earnest pleadings, and pondered awhile ere he replied, "You are mistaken, my dear; such a legacy would be of no real service in a case like his; it would all be absorbed by creditors, his debts are far beyond that amount. But there is another consideration: the time is past for making your generous cession, she is virtually incapable of altering what she has done. So that intending to benefit persons of whom, after all, you really know nothing, you would have involved them in vexatious litigation with your own husband."

"But it would all have rested with you; you would not surely have disputed that clause?"

"I am afraid you estimate my magnanimity too highly. It would have been with much regret; I feel

for them sincerely. Not that I hold myself responsible for their loss. I did not supplant; I only succeeded. If her capricious fancy had not fixed on my unworthy self it would have lighted somewhere else: who can say? 'a college or a cat' perhaps! It was utterly gone from its first object."

There was truth in this; and Lady Emma was fain to lay it to heart as her only consolation at the conclusion of the discourse. It was not the first they had held on the subject, which really was to both the cause of much concern. But whereas hers prompted to an unceasing effort to render assistance, his ended always in dismissing the whole question from his mind as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MESSAGE of importance was brought to Lord Henry's residence only next morning: Miss Langley had sustained a second and very severe attack.

Lady Emma was considerably affected by the event, coming as it did without any new premonitory symptoms. Her husband received the intelligence with a decent composure of manner; the necessity of being on the spot was what seemed chiefly to impress him.

"I will accompany you there," said Lady Emma.

"You had better not; the scene will be distressing, and you can no longer impart comfort."

"But I shall not feel easy unless I see her

again, poor woman! her fate is so sad! There is something so very wretched in having no relation, no one much attached, present at the last hour!"

"But you say she is unconscious."

"So they tell me; but it may be a mistake."

On arriving at the dying woman's house, Lady Emma asked Marshall for a more circumstantial account of what had happened.

"Do you think she was the worse for talking more than usual last night?"

"I dont know, my Lady, I can't pretend to say; it's likely enough," replied the attendant, scowling darkly at Lord Henry. His conscience appeared to be perfectly easy on the question.

"There is no occasion to trace this second attack to any particular cause," he said; "it is quite in the usual course of disease."

He then gave a variety of directions in the manner of one who felt himself already master of all and every thing around. Marshall had evidently the strongest possible inclination to dispute his authority; but as long as her mistress still lived she controlled herself so far as to avoid

the danger of instant dismission. Her incivility, however, was so marked that Lord Henry tried to persuade his wife to return home at once.

"Why should you remain?" he urged; "you have nothing more to hear."

"But I came to see her, and I mean to do so."

"It will pain yourself, without in the least benefiting her."

She still persisted, though it was evident that her resolution was not maintained without considerable effort.

"I will take you to the door, then," he said.

"The door!" it was that through which she had on the former occasion caught that terrible glimpse! she could not approach it now without considerable tremour. But it requires great moral courage to avow a feeling of cowardice after reiterated caution has been disregarded, she therefore only humbly asked Marshall if her husband might also be admitted.

"If he pleases, my Lady," was the frigid reply; and they entered together accordingly. Lady Emma could not at the first instant look towards the bed, but when she acquired sufficient firmness,

she found the spectacle far less shocking than before. There was no unnatural contrast: the patient now looked, not as a victim seized by the King of Terrors at a moment the most inopportune, but as one who had yielded under a gradual decay. Still, it was a sight fitted to appal the least reflecting mind. It was new to the husband as well as the wife: he gazed in silent awe, while she hung trembling on his arm. They were uncertain if the dying woman recognized or even saw them, her eyes were widely open, but had no expression, and the power of articulation was totally gone. A mournful idea took possession of Lady Emma's mind, she imagined that thought might not be extinct, though the sufferer had no longer the power of imparting it. Perhaps, aware of her awful position, she was longing to speak, to act, anxious to annul a deed which weighed heavily on her conscience!

How inexpressibly painful must be such a state of mind! Impelled by a wish to ascertain how much of perception remained, Lady Emma at length ventured to touch one of the rigidly extended hands; but hastily withdrew her own

from the contact, chilled to the heart by that strange, clammy cold. Her husband felt her shudder, and said, in a subdued tone, "Come away; this is no sight for you to look upon."

As they withdrew Catherine entered the room. Standing beside the bed she mournfully contemplated the imminent departure of one who had never known life's true and only use. Marshall stood opposite to her, in another frame of mind: grieved to lose a mistress to whom, from mere length of service, she was sincerely attached, but exasperated beyond measure by the final destruction of all her schemes on behalf of the Falconbridges.

A solemn stillness, betokening the impending event, reigned throughout the house. But it was broken startlingly: voices were heard, one high, —distinct. An instantaneous conviction brought the two watchers in the death-chamber into unison of feeling.

"Oh, they haven't met, surely!" Marshall exclaimed, while Catherine, with gentle but quick tread, crossed the room to the window. It was in vain: she could see nothing to confirm

or dispel the dread which impelled the action—a projection of part of the house cut off her view.

At that instant a female servant appeared, with a half-scared look, to say that a gentleman who did not give his name wanted to see Miss Mansfield.

"Is Lord Henry gone?" she eagerly asked; and, on receiving an affirmative reply, descended with real thankfulness to meet Colonel Falconbridge. He scarcely moved his head in answer to her salutation, as he said, "I am come because I am told that *she* is dying."

"Miss Langley? It is very true," Catherine replied.

With a strong gesture of scornful incredulity he rejoined, "Excuse me, it is important for me to *know*. I came to ascertain the fact."

"You are not yet satisfied of its truth?" she answered, looking steadily upon him.

"Reports are not always perfectly accurate," he replied, with the same bitterness of manner.

"Come, then, and see!"

He followed to the room and looked. Who

that saw could question? the awful presence was before him. Involuntarily the lofty head was lowered, a shadow passed over the brow: pride was rebuked, the hatred of years gave way. But it was but to revert a moment after with added force to another object. Turning from his passing gaze on the inanimate form, he said to Catherine, with an expression she was never able to efface from memory, "Well and truly done! I thank you in my wife's name!"

And she actually felt as she heard that cutting reproach as if she had been indeed a perfidious friend. So terribly fierce was the expression of his wrath and desperation that Marshall stood paralyzed with terror. But as he quitted the room a sudden impulse seemed to seize her, and she rushed after him.

"Sir—Colonel," she cried, "do but hear!"

But he heard not—he was gone; and she made no further effort to follow. She re-entered the room with a strange, half-bewildered look; and not a word was exchanged between her and Catherine.

The danger—the thought of which had struck them both with dread—had indeed been imminent.

Another moment, and they would have encountered each other! those two, one of whom detested the other with an intensity which could hardly fail to provoke retort.

Lady Emma on leaving that house of gloom complied, merely to please him, with her husband's proposal of a drive round the Park before them. It would restore the tone of her spirits, he urged; she felt that quiet and solitude were better adapted to her present frame of mind. In her own house she hoped to be secure of these; but there was one who had an inalienable right of admission, the Duchess of Ilminster. Her Grace was much interested by hearing what had occurred.

"Dying! really dying! Is she indeed? Well, it is just as I predicted from the first. I knew it was impossible she could withstand it long. But your going there was highly imprudent—a great trial to the nervous system! And for what? what benefit has resulted from it?"

"None to her; she did not know us; but I hope it may be of some good to myself. It surely is desirable to be sometimes reminded of the doom which awaits us all!"

"Desirable! take pains to be reminded of what—Heaven knows!—we are quite unable to forget! My dear child, you quite distress me: go to sleep, pray, and awake a rational being."

These remonstrances were renewed when Lord Henry, that evening, made his appearance alone at a party at Ilminster House.

"Why do I not see Emma?" was her greeting.

"She is not quite herself yet; her visit to Park Lane has unfitted her for society."

"Say rather, she needs it particularly. She has been too much in the way of melancholy scenes of late. I highly disapproved her passing so much time in the sick-room. A daily call was indispensable, but it should not have been extended into a long visit."

This remark was rather embarrassing to Lord Henry.

"True," he answered, "it was perhaps, unadvisable; but it is over now."

"Take care of her," said the Duchess, impressively; "with all her charming vivacity, she has *au fond du cœur*, I do assure you, a dangerous excess of susceptibility, derived in part from her

dear mother. My sister's nature was far too sensitive. I may say the same, alas, for my own! What report to-night?"

"Much the same as the morning."

"Wonderful tenacity of life!" ejaculated her Grace, as she moved gracefully towards some newly arrived guests.

The party was small—the last gatherings of the season. Lord Henry infused life into all. The solemn impression of the morning was effaced from his mind as soon as he quitted the scene; the benefits which would accrue from the impending event could not be so soon forgotten.

The Duchess was appeased.

"I forgive you for coming singly," she said, in parting. "Tell that silly, naughty wife of yours that you have won pardon this time for yourself and her."

On re-entering his house his servants, with grave decorum, announced that all was over. Miss Langley had expired while he was the centre of that gay assembly. He had no longer to fear any change of purpose—all was irrevocably his own.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE last of the Langleys was borne to the resting-place of her predecessors with as much outward pomp as if her lineage had been equal to the greatest among them. She left no directions on the subject, it being one on which she could never endure to dwell; but Lord Henry held it to be but due that all should be ordered in accordance with her prevailing tastes in life. Attending himself as chief mourner, he invited several titled friends resident in the neighbourhood to take part in the procession. Of real regret or reverence there was but little; except by a few favourite domestics, her loss was almost unfelt. The inhabitants of Ardwell manifested no interest in the event, beyond its affording occasion for an imposing pageant.

Lady Emma remained in London, rather impatient to behold a seat the splendour of which fame now loudly magnified; but Lord Henry returned to her, decided against making it his immediate residence. It yet wanted several things essential to render it a habitable dwelling. The stabling was insufficient, and kennels there were none. Till these deficiencies were supplied he could not take that leading rank among the sportsmen of the neighbourhood to which his ambition already vaulted. Besides, the house could hardly be made the scene of festivity directly after the demise of its mistress: some decent interval must elapse. He proposed, therefore, that they should immediately go abroad; a plan in which Lady Emma the more willingly acquiesced, because, with the exception of Paris, where she had spent two or three pleasant weeks with her aunt, she knew nothing of the Continent. No time was lost in fulfilment of this resolve. Within ten days after the interment of Miss Langley they were gone.

Catherine soon after received a letter from Mrs. Falconbridge, informing her that the Colonel had

returned to England. This, indeed, was not the novel intelligence the writer supposed it to be. But she added that he had acceded to her entreaties to be allowed to return with him to the Continent. Her satisfaction in receiving this permission was as great as if he who granted it had been all she fondly believed him when she accepted his suit. Rudely as he had undeceived her on that point, she was not the less desirous to be constantly with him, seeking to alleviate the evils his faults had brought upon them both.

"My only regret," she said, "is the separation from Langley; but we leave him in excellent hands, in those of your old acquaintance Charles Herbert. He traced us out a short time ago, and his advice has been most salutary, especially in regard to our boy. Langley already makes it his great object in life to discharge hereafter his father's liabilities; but at his age it is not wonderful that he imagined this purpose might be combined with some active, adventurous career. He had many Eldorado schemes to which I could not refuse to listen, though I knew they could never be brought to bear. But Mr. Herbert, more

judiciously, told him so plainly, and suggested that his only chance must lie in entering early on commercial enterprise. Langley readily adopted the idea, and diligently pursues the necessary course of instruction, though much opposed to his natural inclination. I cannot help asking myself sometimes, Will his career be as successful as his from whom he derives his name? Beechwood, indeed, will not be his recompense; but he has a higher aim. It was not easy to persuade his father to give his consent; but Mr. Herbert has considerable influence with him, and at length prevailed. Langley, therefore, remains with this true friend, who, being also an excellent scholar, undertakes to improve whatever knowledge his desultory education has permitted him to acquire.

"You will not be surprised at our relation's kindness, but remembering him, as you do, a young enthusiast, ensnared by a weak, though accomplished girl, you can hardly be prepared for his proving so very sober a counsellor. The idea has struck me that that early disappointment may have contributed to the change in his character; but this is probably only my woman's vanity—we

like to fancy that affairs of that kind touch men more deeply than they really do.

"I have just seen our zealous friend, Marshall; she is going down to live on her well-deserved legacy in her native place, Broomhill. I rejoice that her anxious efforts in my behalf did not result in loss to herself. Poor woman! she cannot reconcile herself to our disappointment; but *we* must."

Donnington without Lady Emma would have been a cheerless abode to Catherine but for the frequent letters she received. Every one knows that the light, hasty sketches from a beloved hand will oftentimes place a foreign land more vividly before the mind than the elaborate delineations of a professed tourist; and thus she acquired that winter a more accurate knowledge of Rome, its relics of the past, and still existing wonders, than she had ever collected from books. Concerning the society among whom she mingled, Lady Emma had much to communicate; but a very few extracts from her correspondence are enough to produce:—

"Sir Aubrey and Lady Vere are here. They

came direct from England, and will soon return. His love of the arts induces him to take the principal cities separately. I am glad to see that she possesses a strong natural taste for these favourite pursuits of his: they are evidently very happy, and she is much admired by all foreigners here. Some of her own countrywomen, I am sorry to say, affect rather to slight her, but they are both quite above regarding it."

"We have lately met Sir Cæsar Hargrave and his sister Mrs. Berners: her history is an unhappy one; she married early, and was soon separated from her husband—why, is not clearly known; some people say they could, if they might, tell of much ill-usage. There is a great division among us as to whether she is to be admitted or not."

"My situation with respect to Mrs. Berners becomes embarrassing. Sir Cæsar assures Lord Henry that his sister is particularly desirous of my acquaintance, though she does not wish to join in general society. What can I do? Lord Henry is as much perplexed as I am: how can he, to her own brother, avow his scruples?"

The winter ended, the English sojourners bent their way homewards. Much curiosity was excited as to what would now be the conduct of the successor to Miss Langley's wealth. Many, judging from numerous examples, predicted that vast as were his resources, they would still prove inadequate to the supply of his habitual profusion. Others, who could also cite some remarkable precedents, expected a total change of character, inclining strongly to the opposite extreme. His first proceedings were not open to censure either way. A handsome mansion, purchased previously to his return to England, was immediately thrown open to his very large range of acquaintance. These entertainments became at once the objects of every one's aspiration. The Beauchamp-Langleys, young and amiable as they were, outshone all competitors in the character of hosts; even the Duchess of Ilminster was conscious of being in some measure surpassed, though consoled by the persuasion that her dear niece's lustre was but a reflection from her still dearer self. For to her own judicious culture did she attribute those attractions which

she had, in fact, assiduously laboured to check and destroy.

Important questions were now in agitation. Sir Cæsar Hargrave and his accomplished sister had returned to England to abide the final verdict of society. The different maxims of morality, as applied to man and woman, were strongly exemplified in these two instances. The brother had left his country under general opprobrium; but the mere lapse of two years seemed in the opinion of most people to have pretty nearly expiated his offences. Upon his arrival, therefore, he did not find much difficulty in reinstating himself. The sister's case was essentially different: nothing was alleged against her, but a certain degree of freedom exceeding the bounds of prudence in one so unhappily circumstanced. Yet these comparatively venial errors made what had proved easy to him, a work of care and toil to her. She had several faithful partisans, but their efforts failed of success. In vain did they circulate it, as a chief attraction in such a lady's proposed entertainment, that "the charming Mrs. Berners" would grace it with

her presence; the announcement always proved delusive. No one liked to be the first to invite. A particularly marked demonstration of hostility, however, served her more than all the activity of friendship. Lady Coningsby took it upon herself to declare that, whoever else might be induced to receive Mrs. Berners, *she* never would! This high-minded denunciation not only drew upon the noble Viscountess certain caustic reflections, as being aimed at one younger than herself, and certainly not less attractive, but was most skilfully turned to the latter's advantage. It was reported to the Duchess of Ilminster, who, considering herself to hold a casting-vote in all discussions of this kind, was fired with indignation at the presumption of her *parvenue* sister-in-law. She hastened to impart her views on the subject to her niece.

"At your next *soirée*, my dear," she said, with seeming carelessness, "I suppose I shall have the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with Mrs. Berners?"

"Next time? no, certainly not. I am quite undecided how to act. I heartily wish she had remained abroad!"

"This sounds strangely, after being so intimate at Rome!"

"It did not amount to that; we were at last a good deal together; but companionship does not always imply intimacy."

"In the eye of the world it does; and you cannot now disown her without occasioning much remark."

"Let the blame rest on me—let me be thought capricious, if they will."

"Very generously said; but people, you well know, will not put that interpretation on your conduct; this unfortunate woman will be held answerable for all. Her position is most critical; and all depends on you. Neglect her, and you set the seal on her fate; open your doors to her, and she is secure of admission every where. At present, I understand, the Viscountess and her set affect greatly to decry her."

"Lady Coningsby!" was the hearer's surprised exclamation.

"You would hardly have expected *her* to assume the office of public censor!" returned her Grace, in accents of the bitterest contempt.

"So it is, however; and therefore a sense of justice will surely prompt you to vindicate this traduced and unhappy woman as speedily as possible. I really, in your place, should hold it an imperative obligation."

"Well, if it must be, I will invite her for next Friday, though I really think a compliment so long deferred can hardly be worth acceptance. I wish there were some universally recognized law to decide all doubts of this kind! Would it not be well to adopt it as a principle that no one should be received whose claims could possibly be disputed?"

"What code of morality have you been studying, my dear? what possesses your little head with an ambition to reform society?"

"I am not so foolish, I only want to know how I ought to guide my own conduct in this particular."

"Ah, that is a subject for consideration, undoubtedly; but you were not talking of what *is* done, but of what *ought* to be—usually a very unprofitable speculation. Your proposed standard would be far too high, it would be in the power of the slanderous to ruin any one——"

"But, my dear Aunt, I meant nothing unjust or severe!"

"Ah, but it would never do—we are long past such a state of things. Dreadful dissensions would arise, a thousand forgotten scandals be revived—we ourselves, *mon enfant*, might not wholly escape!"

"Why, what could they pretend to say?" asked Lady Emma, a feeling of honourable pride calling additional bloom into her cheeks.

"Nothing that would touch us very nearly, for several generations we are quite intact on all sides; but they would go farther back if we provoked them, and then, perhaps, that little tale about the first Viscountess, your—no, my great-great-grandmother might come under discussion."

"What tale? I never heard any thing about her."

"Indeed! but you must surely have heard that she was a celebrated beauty. Lely's likeness of her at Hallingford is really exquisite—I have often stood before it in adoration. To my mind, it excels all in the Royal Collection. We certainly are much indebted to her! that delicate

profile may be traced among us to this very hour —the forehead especially," concluded her Grace, lightly passing her finger down that feature in her niece's face.

"But her history—what was it?"

"Why, it is said—though after all only in tradition—that there was some little scandal about her at Court. It was in the days of the Merry Monarch, when ideas, you know, were not quite so strict as they are now. In short, our ancestor, as the story saith, became uneasy, and bore her away from the scene of her triumphs rather hastily. That is all," concluded her Grace, displaying by her smile a range of still brilliantly white teeth.

"All!" Lady Emma emphatically repeated.

"It is all long over now, at all events," replied the Duchess, tranquilly, forgetting that she spoke of an immortal spirit. "I only mentioned it to illustrate the danger there would be in your way of remodelling society. The recriminations would be endless. Deal with each separate case as you find it: in some instances it may be expedient rather to overlook what in another would

form a good ground for exclusion. Experience teaches all this. My own system has always been that of having no fixed rule at all. And I believe it is acknowledged that no one has more contributed to give a high tone to society!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE house-agent employed by Lord Henry acted under certain restrictions, and his choice was in consequence unfortunate in one respect: neither husband nor wife liked Belgravia; they agreed in preferring the more ancient settlements of aristocracy. Now, it happened that the only mansion in that quarter likely to suit them was actually within sight of Lord Donnington's, on the opposite side of the square. This vicinity soon proved a source of annoyance to both parties. Lady Donnington, victim as she always held herself to be to the dissipations of her neighbours, had never suffered so acutely as from those inflicted upon her by these newly arrived kith and kin. The series of brilliant parties which were the

delight of so many, the envy of not a few, produced in her the most extreme irritation of nerves. She could, or fancied that she could, distinguish from all others the grinding of carriages to and from that particular door; the loud calling without, the echoes of music within. Under the influence of this feverish excitement she adopted a novel practice: the daily papers, recording such proceedings—whose very names she had hitherto disdained to know—were now by her express order placed on her table, and made part of her regular study. Catherine saw the change with regret, but no word on the subject passed between them. On the morning succeeding Mrs. Berners' first appearance (for it is needless to say Lady Emma's tardy invitation was eagerly accepted) the list of guests was very long. The Marchioness perused it with care, and started perceptibly when she came to *that* name. Apart as she kept from the rest of the world she knew the somewhat equivocal character attached to it, and to find it in the list of Lady Emma's visitants surprised and really pained her. In silence she arose, quitted the house, crossed the square, and

after no very long absence returned and resumed her work. But Catherine's usual reading to her was not required; and the latter knew by many an outward token that her Ladyship's mind was in a state of ferment. In the course of the morning a note from Lady Emma to Catherine was brought in. It was laid aside by the latter, but the Marchioness, looking up with a keen expression in her eyes, said, "Read it at once, Miss Mansfield, it may require an answer."

And Catherine read accordingly these few words:—

"My dear Friend,

"Engaged as I shall be this whole day, I cannot be tolerably tranquil till I have made you acquainted with my troubles. Lady Donnington has been here, giving me such rebukes—so harsh, so unjust! Don't believe her if she tells you I asked Mrs. Berners by Lord Henry's desire, it was entirely owing to my aunt's persuasions; but she will always lay the blame on him, which she knows is most intolerable to me. I

fear I failed in patience with her, but really she is too provoking!

"Ever yours,

"E. B. L."

Here was a letter to read under the close inspection of the person principally concerned! Catherine felt that she coloured as she put it into her workbox.

"Well," said Lady Donnington, with something both of irony and suspicion in her tone, "is it a very pressing affair?"

"It is nothing—merely a few words."

"There is a good deal sometimes in a few words—allow me to judge for myself," said the Marchioness, with outstretched hand. The juncture was critical; to withhold the note would certainly give offence, but to yield it up would be yet more dangerous. Catherine therefore, though with all due respect, declined compliance.

"Your Ladyship must pardon me, there are but a few hastily-written words intended only for me."

"Do you think I do not know what they are,

Miss Mansfield, as well as if I had read them?" said the Marchioness, indignantly.

And then followed an harangue which would be tedious in recital, a torrent of reflections on Lady Emma and Catherine herself, such as would be most likely to irritate the latter's feelings. Passing rapidly from the present to the past, her Ladyship accused the object of her wrath of having, by misdirection when instructress, laid the foundation of all her pupil's subsequent delinquencies. But her intemperate anger led at last to a consequence she had not foreseen. There were limits to Catherine's endurance, though none to her forbearance. When the Marchioness at length recovered from her transport of passion she found that it had deprived her of her companion. Catherine expressed her resolution in few words; but they were explicit. Her Ladyship, though in truth exceedingly vexed, affected nevertheless to treat the intimation with contemptuous indifference. Little passed between them during the remainder of the day; but on the morrow the Marchioness so strongly persuaded herself that Catherine would wish to retract her ill-considered resignation, that

she even prepared in her own mind the very terms in which she would condescend to pass an act of oblivion. But the expected opportunity was not afforded: she had so extravagantly broken the obligations of their mutual compact that Catherine felt she could no longer continue to fulfil hers. It could not be her part to apologize; the wrong was wholly on the other side. Sitting in her own room, at the same window from which she had gazed on her first entrance into the Donnington family, she was revolving the question of her future proceedings when her meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Lady Emma, whose first words were, "How I love this room! it was here that I first felt at home after losing my father! But I must not go back to the past now: I came in haste to ask about the present. Barnes quite frightened me this morning: she says she hears something about your going away——"

"The news has travelled faster than might have been expected then; but it is true."

"My fault—all mine, I am sure!" Lady Emma exclaimed. "That foolish note! how could I write

it? But it did not come into Lady Donnington's hands, I hope?"

"No; but my refusal to show it displeased her greatly, and led to my determination of leaving her. Do not reproach yourself, however; she may easily find some one more in accordance with her opinions than I am, and so be benefited by the change."

"She will not—she cannot find any one who will feel for her as you do! I have done harm to her, to you, and myself!"

"I shall grieve to leave your family again, I own; but you can help me greatly: with your powerful recommendation I shall not despair of finding employment for my humble abilities."

"Send you away again to some great distance?" said Lady Emma, dejectedly.

"We need not lose sight of each other altogether, we may yet meet occasionally."

"I cannot bear to think of it! I am punished, indeed, for my rashness!"

She was silent in sadness for a few instants, then suddenly looked up—it was like sunshine breaking through a cloud.

"The happiest thought has come into my mind!" she said; "instead of regret, all this shall be an occasion of rejoicing for both of us, I hope. You shall not go farther from me, but come nearer—live with me henceforth!"

"Some years hence, perhaps, to take charge of a daughter of yours," said Catherine, cheerfully.

"No; that is a mere chance: I may happen never to have a daughter."

"I will come for a boy, then; up to school-time I shall be competent."

"No, no; all that is too distant and too doubtful! I mean *now*, at once."

"That cannot be, dear Emma; I must come in a recognized capacity."

"You have one, my dearest, best friend—my adviser!"

Catherine was much touched by her earnest warmth; but she replied, "The married need no adviser but their husband."

"Indeed you are mistaken; there are many, many ways in which Henry cannot advise me, and you can."

"I must trust you to him," said Catherine,

smiling and shaking her head. "Indeed I know by experience that a wife's friend is not always sure of a welcome from the husband!"

"You are thinking of Colonel Falconbridge; but surely you must see the difference! I am certain of Henry's warm concurrence. However, if you are so very, very much afraid of putting yourself into our hands, try us for a time—at least make us a visit: come down with us to Beechwood, your dear old home! we are going there in a fortnight. Come, now, I know I hold you fast!" she said, with her brightest smile and fond embrace.

To this suggestion Catherine had nothing to oppose; she could indeed trust to Lord Henry's cordiality as her host for a time. The Marchioness had no difficulty in finding one glad to be her successor, though unable to afford that real, deep sympathy which had made her own companionship so great a comfort. When the Marquis and Marchioness left town, Catherine transferred herself to the neighbouring dwelling. She was most agreeably received: all the servants, following, as they are wont to do, the lead of their superiors, were uniformly respectful and attentive. Her time

passed most happily, though spent in seclusion, for she steadfastly declined making one at any meal, even when no other guests were present. But frequently, at all hours of the day, Lady Emma came in, her countenance saying always, "I am so glad to have you here!" Once, indeed, she expressed the sentiment in words: "I hardly thought I could have been happier; but you have made me so!"

The only trouble of which Catherine had to complain was a want of occupation. Lady Emma's face brightened when she mentioned it.

"You want employment?" said she. "I am glad to hear it, for I can supply you with abundance—just of a kind to suit you. Come to my own sitting-room."

They went accordingly; and Lady Emma, opening a drawer, spread before her a large collection of letters and papers.

"See," said she, "all these relate to applications made to me since my marriage. Schools, hospitals, charitable societies, petitioners of every description, some of whom tell very piteous tales. I did give a trifle to some, meaning to consider the case more

fully afterwards; but I fear it would be difficult to trace them now. All, you see, is in disorder. I want the help of your good management and judgment."

Lord Henry entered at the moment.

"What is all this?" he asked, laughingly: "have you undertaken the secretaryship just vacant?" Then taking up one of the letters, he read it with the running commentary: "Servant out of place: six children, sick wife—all the usual story! My dear Emma, do you intend to take all these into consideration?"

"I have delayed it too long, there is a great accumulation; but with Miss Mansfield's assistance I hope to accomplish it."

"Never! if you begin in this manner, beggars will cluster round you as thickly as bees upon a honeysuckle!"

"But what can I do with all these letters?"

"Send them to the Mendicity Society."

"Ah, that is the advice my aunt gives; but I don't know—it hardly seems to me enough."

"It is an excellent institution, of sound, practical utility to rich and poor."

"How do you know? have you had many such applications?"

"Rather more than I can call to mind; the first alone is impressed on my memory. I was a raw youth, fresh from Eton, when some impoverished individual—schoolmaster or shoemaker, I forget which he called himself—'trusted to my Lordship's well-known liberality' to set him up in the custom of heads or heels, as the case might be. To what extent I supported my character for benevolence I do not remember, but the thing proved a cheat, and drew many other impositions after it." And looking back to Catherine with a careless smile, as he left the room, "I wish you well through your task, Miss Mansfield!" he said; "you will find it no easy matter to distinguish false from true."

"He is not speaking seriously now," said Lady Emma, with an anxiously apologetical expression of countenance. "But I am afraid I have given you hard work! only if you can find out any deserving persons among all these, give them whatever you think best. And these public charities, examine them all, and tell me to

which it is best to subscribe—to all, perhaps. In this hurrying London life I really can do nothing, judge nothing! I hope it will be better when we are settled at Beechwood. I am ashamed to think how little I have given as yet."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ALL Lord Henry's proposed alterations and additions being now complete, Beechwood stood ready for his residence, and both he and Lady Emma looked forward eagerly to going thither. But there was a difference of opinion between them. He declared himself entirely averse to the prevailing mode of celebrating such occasions. He hated addresses and thanks, tables laid out on lawns, rustic sports, and grand displays of fireworks. He hoped those about him would be content to give him a silent welcome; and he certainly should not deem it necessary to call them together merely to say he was glad to settle among them. Much might, on each side, be fairly taken for granted: he saw no

use in their exchanging gratulations in the face of the whole kingdom. Lady Emma took a different view of the question. In general, she assured him, she disliked publicity as much as he did, but on taking possession of a place to which they were altogether strangers, she thought it would be desirable to study what would best please their neighbours, though at some sacrifice of personal inclination.

But the Duchess of Ilminster strongly espoused Lord Henry's side. The fatigues attendant on those grand rural rejoicings were beyond imagination. It was quite a mistake to suppose the lower orders were easily satisfied; it required quite as much care and forethought to provide for their gratification, in their rude sort of way, as to entertain those of more refined taste. And after all what good purpose did it answer? It only unsettled them, made them more sensible of the hardships of their ordinary condition, and consequently more disposed to envy those above them. She was much inclined to think that all such entertainments did serious harm, and quite sure, at all events, that they gave an immense deal of trouble.

The noble owners of Beechwood, therefore, repaired to that fine seat for the first time in an extremely unostentatious manner. Instructions were given to the steward, who, having spent his life in the service of the late proprietor, was easily induced to transfer himself to that of her successor, to conduct the necessary preparations with as much privacy as possible. The journey had been purposely arranged so as not to terminate before sunset, and the richer hues of that hour were fast fading away when the train of equipages entered the village of Ardwell.

That heart must be dead indeed which is not awakened to lively interest in revisiting the scenes of early youth; but so seldom is it that we return after long absence, ourselves not greatly altered, to find the spot itself little changed, that pleasure is generally allayed by many opposite feelings. Catherine had anticipated this time with intense longing, her heart beat quicker at her near approach to those well-remembered haunts; but when actually there she was painfully bewildered. Her own condition did not differ materially from what it was at her departure; but she had lived

in the lives of others, whose lot had not been so uniform. What a strange revolution had occurred in all connected with Beechwood! How was she now approaching it? Not on the invitation of one long entitled to regard it as her future possession, but in company with her on whose account she had formerly quitted its vicinity—quite unconnected with it then, now become all that Maria Rashleigh was to have been. To escape from recollections which unfitted her for the demands of the passing hour, she gazed in every direction but that of the Rectory. Of that roof, half hidden behind a fine belt of elms, she hardly dared trust herself with a glance. In the village itself she observed no material change, no marked indications either of rising prosperity or increased distress; there were no large new-built houses, neither did some picturesque old barns and sheds look much more dilapidated than of yore. But it was otherwise with the inhabitants; they could not remain stationary through the lapse of fifteen years. She did not with absolute certainty recognize a single man or woman, she could but conjecture that they

might have been formerly her acquaintances; that some of the labourers now soberly returning from their day's work might be the very urchins who ran alongside the carriage which bore her away, and the young mothers holding up their babes to admire the passing spectacle, the identical little girls whom she had left tottering under the weight of brothers and sisters.

It was soon apparent that Lord Henry's injunctions as to secrecy had been either neglected or found impracticable. His arrival was evidently a matter of general expectation. Groups of gazers were collected in the pathway; and some attempts had been made to mark duteous respect. No triumphal arches spanned the road, but all the larger and better cottages were decorated with garlands and other floral devices; and the owners of these stood forth to bow and curtsy, proud at once of their superior taste and prosperity. At length, as they passed the church, around whose ivy-grown tower were clustered the more adventurous youngsters, hurrahing to the shrillest pitch of their voices, a peal of welcome sounded forth, which at once summoned together the whole

community. Stragglers came running down the lanes, old people, who had till then lingered in their chimney-nooks, tottered to their thresholds, the latticed casements were hastily thrown open, mothers and babes peering out, all apprized that their curiosity must be gratified then or not at all. The loud alarum jarred painfully on Catherine's feelings: it was strange and sad to hear an event connected with so much sorrow to the good Rector thus triumphantly proclaimed by the bells of his own church. But she knew too well his truly Christian spirit to apprehend that he would disapprove the simple efforts of his parishioners to testify the gladness they might naturally entertain. In fact, so far was he from allowing personal regrets to interfere with his sympathy for them, that he had actually contributed aid to those who needed it: flowers cultured by his own hands were displayed in the trophies of some of the very poor. By this time the whole active population of Ardwell was in progress towards the manor, sending forth shouts of welcome, loud and united as the laborious endeavour to keep up with spirited horses would allow.

"Pray make them drive slower," said Lady Emma: "I cannot bear to see those poor men so over-exerting themselves!"

And Lord Henry, seeing that followed he must be, gave orders accordingly for a moderate rate of speed. He was not himself the principal object of gaze—he had been already seen, at the time of Miss Langley's funeral; and, strikingly handsome as he was, there was nothing in his aspect which particularly conciliated popular regard. But Lady Emma's face, at once so bright, so gentle, won the hearts of all beholders. The crowd pressed on to the very gates of the park, nor would be impeded even there, admission could hardly be denied. The greensward on either side the train of carriages had its eager throng. Lady Emma, when within the domain, looked around in delighted surprise.

"Are you satisfied?" asked her husband.

"More—much more!" she replied, with animation, turning to view in another direction the far-spreading woods and plantations.

"A pleasant habitable place," he observed, looking around also with complacency: "above all, one's own!"

On alighting at the portico, a friend came forward to offer his greetings. Hugh Melton, a brother in all his favourite sports, had been invited by Lord Henry to meet him on his arrival. Agreeable as a companion, he might also, as an inhabitant of that part of the country, be able to give serviceable hints. They shook hands with great cordiality.

"But how's this, my Lord?" said young Melton; "I thought you were coming *incog.;* and you seem, on the contrary, to have brought half Berkshire in your train!"

"Very true!"—a smile and slight action of the shoulders accompanying the words. "To own the truth, I could willingly have dispensed with so numerous an attendance, but it would have hazarded my popularity. To begin with an affront would hardly do."

"Granted; but I presume you mean to dismiss the concourse now? The ladies must find that hallooing rather overpowering."

"Certainly," replied Lord Henry: "enough has been done for the present; it is time to be quiet and alone."

He accordingly turned towards the crowd, bowed courteously in sign of adieu, and entered his mansion without further delay. Two of his cousins, the daughters of Captain Beauchamp, had accompanied him very willingly on this interesting occasion: they were now standing in the hall with Lady Emma, surveying its proportions and decorations with admiration. But the ball-room, the walls and ceiling of which were enriched by mythological paintings emblematic of its use, had still greater attractions in their eyes. Trying the elasticity of the flooring by a few turns of a waltz, they pronounced it admirably adapted to its purpose.

"It is a sweet, charming room! Do, Emma, let us have a dance very soon: your neighbours will be infinitely obliged."

"The echoes have been silent here some time," said Mr. Melton. "The poor old lady almost outlived her sprightliness; but I will do her the justice to own she kept it up with spirit till a late period. These boards have rebounded to the steps of two generations. My mother and aunt preserve lively recollections of the place; and I have

made one at several not badly got up affairs myself."

Catherine had not many recollections attached to the house, she had entered it but seldom, and at long intervals. But there it was that once in her life she had mingled in a large and gay assemblage, in celebration of Maria Rashleigh's eighteenth birthday. This room especially vividly recalled that evening, in strong contrast to its present appearance. Occupied as it now was, only by half a dozen persons quietly looking about them, her memory peopled it with an animated throng, conspicuous among whom were the mistress of the mansion, in her blithest and most hospitable mood, and the object of her then fond partiality, diffusing on all around the spirit of her own more graceful, yet not less buoyant gaiety. Those brilliant eyes seemed in that moment actually to sparkle before her. She awoke from her trance to find others fixed upon her, of a different hue, another expression. But the glance she caught was instantly withdrawn: it was the tender care which watches unseen.

"Don't you find it rather chilly here?" said

Lady Emma to her companions; "had we not better move on?"

All followed her accordingly; but on entering another of the suite of rooms, which was in the front of the house, they were surprised by an exclamation of the youngest Miss Beauchamp.

"See," she cried, "those poor people are still standing in the park!"

"So they are, indeed!" said Lord Henry, advancing cautiously to reconnoitre: "this must not be; upon my word, their enthusiasm should, in all reason, have cooled by this time!"

"The evening is sharp enough to chill it," said Hugh Melton, rubbing his hands: "I rather suspect it wants warming, on the contrary."

"What! do you mean," asked Lord Henry, "that we have been wanting in hospitality? It is really too true! I forgot what ought to be done. I am quite ashamed! this must be amended." He summoned the steward, a rather crabbed-looking personage, of downright meaning and blunt speech.

"Unwin," said his new master, "those good people yonder don't seem inclined to disperse: it grows late, they would be better at home; but

I don't wish them to be unhandsomely dismissed; let them be supplied liberally with whatever they like—ale, and meat, too, if you can provide enough."

"They don't want to eat or drink either, my Lord, so far as I know; they say they only wait to see her Ladyship."

A smile, but accompanied by a flush indicative of deeper feeling, passed over the face of the young nobleman as he heard this answer.

"If that be all," he said, "we can the sooner satisfy their wishes."

Throwing up the sash nearest to him, he led his wife to it, and stood beside her, with a proud consciousness that of all he called his own she was the most worthy of envy. The multitude were not ungrateful: at that distance, and by that fast-fading light they could not discern the countenance whose sweetness had so fascinated them, but the graceful action which acknowledged their homage was sufficient to sustain their excitement. The woodlands re-echoed with their tumultuous acclamations. Lady Emma was deeply affected: her heart expanded with an earnest desire to repay,

by substantial benefits, these vehement expressions of good-will. Raising her glistening eyes to her husband's, she said, so as to be heard only by him, "I hope we shall make them very happy!"

He did not speak; but she knew by the closer pressure of the arm which encircled her waist that her feelings had found an echo in his heart. The sentiment, however, was quickly disturbed: the Miss Beauchamps, tired probably of an enthusiasm in which they had no concern, began to laugh. Lord Henry thought he detected something like a curl on Mr. Melton's lip; and instantly that dread of ridicule, fatal to the most generous impulses of an Englishman, was all predominant in his mind.

"Come," he said, hastily, "we have had rather too much of this, the air is keen: I wish it may not have done some mischief among you!"

Down went the window: the crowd took the hint and dispersed; the ladies retired to dress; Lord Henry lingered for a short discourse with his friend.

"How did I get through it just now?" he asked, with some degree of anxiety.

"Excellently well," was the satisfactory reply;

on receiving which, he threw himself into the depths of a capacious *fauteuil* in an attitude of careless ease.

"A landowner's part is rather a difficult one to have to play on a sudden," said he; "it requires some previous study. Every station has a science of its own; and I feel, I confess, not profoundly skilled in mine."

"Each class has its cant, say rather, my Lord," answered Mr. Melton, with a laugh.

"We will not quarrel about terms, the one may do as well as the other; but call it which you will, it cannot be acquired on the instant."

"Excuse me for differing again, no teacher has so good a method as necessity. Why, under that powerful spur, I myself lately acted as chairman at a school examination!"

"You!" exclaimed Lord Henry, incredulously.

"I did, upon my word; and acquitted myself famously too! The thing, for once, was not devoid of sport. It came upon me suddenly: an uncle laid up with the gout, fretting himself worse because he could not take his accustomed duty, I offered my services. The old gentleman hailed

me as the best of nephews. Off I set—conned over a few good stock-phrases by the way; was received with profound respect; stood up to talk with a grave face about the 'blessings of a sound education,' 'incalculable benefits to the community,' and so on; pronounced the pupils *en masse* to be wonderfully come on in the last year, gave the head boy of each class a familiar tap, complimented the master handsomely; did not forget my uncle's donation, added a trifle of my own, made a number of bows—and left them all persuaded that I was a most zealous promoter of the great work, national education! What do you say to this, my Lord?"

"That it affords good encouragement certainly; nevertheless, I shall be better pleased to escape such a call; I never played president at any kind of meeting but the Eton dinner, and did not much enjoy even that."

"With these dispositions you will find it an advantage to have had a female predecessor. Beechwood has not of late had that leading in county affairs which might otherwise have belonged to it."

"So much the better; rely upon it, my neighbours will not find me ambitious to jostle them out of their places. By a most extraordinary stroke of fortune I find myself master of an estate of my own, and all my desire is to enjoy it quietly in my own way. I am satisfied with the place; it seems calculated to afford all I want."

"I don't know one more desirable in every way," replied his friend, enthusiastically. "It was really a capital thought of the old lady's: I shall drink her glorious memory with a right good-will!"

"Hush!" said Lord Henry, reprovingly, yet scarcely suppressing a smile.

"Well, then, Prosperity and perpetuity to the house of Beauchamp-Langley! that will form an unexceptionable toast."

"Which shall be most gratefully acknowledged," replied Lord Henry, rising as he spoke.

Mr. Melton grasped his hand in renewed congratulation: "My Lord, I am serious—very serious in what I say: I consider your coming among us as a great benefit to the neighbourhood! As for the Falconbridges, we are well rid of them —I don't mean the wife: I hear she's a nice

woman; but she shouldn't have married that man!"

With these cordial words he withdrew. Lord Henry, when alone, folded his arms on his breast, surveying the apartment in its length, breadth, and height; yet he was not engaged in measuring its dimensions—far different contemplations occupied his mind. In vivid retrospection came before him his career as a younger brother, without lands, without money. It might be that the embarrassments of that period did not sit quite so lightly on his spirit as he made the world believe; it might be that there was some taint of bitterness in his recollections, for there was an unusual moodiness on his brow. Slowly he walked to the window where he had lately stood with his wife, but possessed with other thoughts than those he had shared with her. Nothing was now visible; but he knew his fair domain spread wide before him, and dismissed with little effort the remembrance of mortifications from which he was now for ever set free.

It was agreeable to observe, in his way to his dressing-room, how thoroughly adapted was his

mansion to become the residence of one of his high rank. There must have been something of prescience in the architect employed by Richard Langley: he must surely have foreseen that his design was destined for more fitting occupation at no very distant period.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THREE months had elapsed since that day of arrival; the noble proprietors of Beechwood had become familiarized with their habitation and all belonging to it: their tenantry and neighbours, on their side, seemed almost to have forgotten that they had ever known it in another's possession.

Catherine while in London had entered earnestly on the charge of dispensing Lady Emma's bounty. Almost every petitioner proved an impostor; but in tracing out their falsities, so much real want and misery came to light as fully to employ all that they could have demanded. Lady Emma was rejoiced to know that so much good had been done in her behalf, and only deferred

till her being at Beechwood the forming a more regular system of beneficence.

The time was now come, but not the opportunity.

"I am quite disappointed," she one day remarked, "as to the leisure of a country residence. I really find myself more engaged than when in town. When friends are actually staying with you, the first point to be considered is their taste and inclination. And, unfortunately, except Lady Margaret, I have found none who would enter into any thing beyond the topics of the hour. The A's for instance, they are very agreeable people, but they care for nothing but the lightest, most frivolous affairs! I shall be sorry when they are gone, but yet I do not think I can attend to any thing of real importance while they stay."

The A's departed in their due course, but the B's followed, and then came the C's, and so on, in interminable succession. The society at Beechwood continued essentially the same, though the parts composing it underwent perpetual change, and the young hostess still found that it demanded her whole care and attention.

Lord Henry was better satisfied with his first experience of life upon his own estate. It did not prove to impose any new, uncongenial duties; he was at full liberty to pursue his favourite amusements, with the highly agreeable difference of being now the entertainer instead of the guest. Well content as he was himself, he was altogether perplexed to understand the symptoms of disquietude his wife occasionally betrayed.

"I cannot comprehend you of late," he said; "you appear to have some vexation, or trouble of mind, for which I can imagine no possible cause. Are you tired of the place?"

"Oh, no; I love it more and more every day! I only wish we had an interval of freedom that we might take the state of the village seriously into consideration."

"The state of the village! what is there in it to call for particular solicitude? Miss Mansfield, I suppose, brings every case of distress before you; and, for my own part, I gave orders to Unwin on my first coming down to keep up every thing just as it was in Miss Langley's time; and I really believe him to be a trustworthy

man, on whose punctual compliance I can depend."

"Do you think poor Miss Langley was exactly the best example to follow? It would be wrong in us to disparage her, but, I confess, her subscription to the schools seems to me to have borne no proportion to her wealth."

"Let your own exceed it, then, doubly, trebly, if you will. The same shall be done on my part; and then, I hope, your scrupulous conscience will be at rest."

"No," she replied, "that is not all; I still think more is required of us, though I hardly know what."

"Communicate your ideas as far as they extend."

"I am rather more clear about your part than my own," she began.

"No uncommon case with us poor mortals," he rejoined. But there was in her eyes that tender earnestness of expression so often seen before their marriage: it had not wholly lost its power to touch.

"Go on," he said, rather more seriously; "give

me your beau-ideal of my new character as land-owner."

"To be the object of confidence and attachment to all around," she answered, in a tremulous tone, and with glistening eyes.

He paused awhile before replying, "I think, my dear, there is some degree of error in your notions on this subject; you have formed them probably on an antique model. The relation between land-owner and tenant is not the same as between lord and vassal in the olden time. For feudal protection and allegiance we have substituted liberal terms on one side, punctual payment on the other. Do you not recognize the truth of this?"

"In part," she answered; "but it does not satisfy me entirely——"

The entrance of a guest broke off their discourse: a ride was arranged, and Lord Henry soon accompanied him from the room, but he turned back for a few parting words.

"You are not satisfied?" he said, affectionately kissing his wife: "I have not time to discuss the question fully; but though I do not want to become an object of ridicule, as well as dislike, by assuming

an obsolete character, you need not fear my neglecting the real duties of the present day."

She smiled with fond, but rather sad affection, still holding him gently by the arm.

"That plan we talked of yesterday," she said, hesitatingly—"have I your consent?"

"What plan? about the tumble-down cottages?"

"No; the Old Manor—my wish, my particular wish."

"I remember; yes—no; we must talk that over first. Go now, dearest, go on your deeds of charity, and let me see a bright face at my return —it is all I want in the world now!"

Catherine at Beechwood did not dwell apart, as she had steadily persisted in doing in London.

"The only difference between Miss Mansfield and my other friends is, that I have always the pleasure of her society," was Lady Emma's reply to a friend who had taken the liberty to press her rather closely with inquiries on that point. But perhaps not one of the shifting assemblage of guests, Lady Margaret Vere excepted, recognized her as truly entitled to associate with them. Fully conscious that her position was anomalous, it had

never been her purpose long to remain in it: she waited but till some favourable opportunity of seeking independence should present itself, and till Lady Emma should be able to endure the thought of her departure, the slightest hint at which gave her evidently the most acute pain.

But the master of the house, was *his* cordiality unabated? upon that the prolongation of her stay must absolutely depend. As yet the most sensitive delicacy could detect no shade of alteration. But on the morrow of the little dialogue just recorded a sudden change occurred.

"Where is Lady Emma, Barnes?" asked Lord Henry, an hour or two after breakfast.

"In her Ladyship's own room, my Lord, with Miss Mansfield," was the reply; on receiving which, with a half muttered "I thought so" on his lips, and considerable irritation in his mind, the husband proceeded at once to that favourite apartment, into which none but the wife's most intimate friends were admitted.

"Why are you not with us, Emma?" he asked, abruptly; "your absence is extremely ungracious; you knew what was going forward."

Sir Cæsar Hargrave and his sister were among the large Christmas party now assembled: the company were at that moment admiring Mrs. Berners' rehearsal of her part in a French drama.

"Is it begun already?" replied Lady Emma, in a somewhat languid tone. "Well, I will join them; but I own I would much rather remain quietly here."

"I thought you were fond of French acting."

"Very fond—of genuine French."

"You are exceedingly critical if this will not satisfy you; Lady Belmont, half a Frenchwoman herself, declares she should hardly detect that she was not listening to a Parisian born and bred."

"I am glad she is so well pleased; but, to say the truth, I fear the imitation will be rather too perfect for me this morning—I have a bad headache, and her voice in those ariettas is very shrill."

"Oh, she is at once too good, and not good enough, is she?" he answered; and with a heightened colour, but without vouchsafing another word, he quitted the room. Lady Emma remained in painful surprise, and Catherine on her account almost disliked him, for the first time.

The hidden meaning of this little scene was to be traced in certain slight occurrences. Some time past, Mrs. Berners could not rest content merely with the privilege of being admitted to Lady Emma's parties: her morning calls soon became frequent; and Lord Henry would sometimes amuse himself by trifling a little with this lively and pretty coquette.

It was at first an almost unconscious return to disused habits, a mark, indeed, not of his admiration, but of his secret contempt for the lady. But the manifestations of alarm which it awakened in Lady Emma tempted him to a wilful repetition of the fault. It gratified at once his self-love and his yet ardent affection for her to excite an anxiety too unreproachful to be stigmatized as jealousy, and then to allay, without seeming to have discerned it, by a word, a look, a caress. All this however, as has been said, was but transient: at Beechwood his demeanour towards the dame had been exactly what it was towards his other guests, and he might, therefore, have had reason to complain had his wife really cherished the resentment of which he suspected her. It chanced that as he entered the

room, already irritated by that mistaken idea, the words fell on his ear, spoken rather eagerly by Catherine, "In short it is coquetry; that is the true name."

Of course this censure referred to Mrs. Berners—it was actually applied to the heroine of a new novel. And of course his wife had done him the grievous wrong of imparting an unfounded sentiment of jealousy to a female friend.

With all the indignation excited by this incident smouldering in his mind, Lord Henry went to drive the Duchess of Ilminster, arrived but yesterday on a first visit, around his domain. A bright sunshine displayed its beauties to advantage; her Grace was in excellent spirits, and expressed herself with animation. Yet, notwithstanding all her encomiums, the proprietor showed little of real gratification: he could not hide his unwonted ill-humour from so quick an observer. She saw that he was not in the vein to be flattered, but, without making any direct inquiry, waited till chance should throw light on the cause of his discontent. This occurred when they reached a part of the estate at a considerable distance from

the mansion. Looking down a slope on her right hand, her Grace exclaimed, in real surprise, "Why, what *terra incognita* have we reached? This, surely, is not part of the estate!"

"Yes; that is all that remains of the Old Manor House."

"A melancholy fragment—why leave it remaining? That ivied gable is rather picturesque, but on the whole it has an unpleasing air of desolation. If not entirely demolished, it might be converted to profitable use—an ornamental dairy-farm, perhaps. Let us talk it over with Emma—she has excellent taste——"

"She has a project of her own in regard to it," he replied, rather as to himself than to his companion.

"A scheme in regard to that ruin? What is it, then?" asked the Duchess.

The question touched on a topic particularly unwelcome to him at the moment, but there was no evading some reply. "Miss Mansfield was brought up there," he answered; and seeing that would not suffice, added, coldly, "on which account it is Emma's wish that it should be repaired and fitted up for her residence."

"Ah," rejoined the Duchess, with one of her best modulated sighs, "*toujours cela!* But you have not consented?"

"Not yet," he replied, attempting to break off the colloquy by driving on at a quickened rate. She humoured him with a short silence, but only with the design of renewing the discourse to better purpose. When they had proceeded about a quarter of a mile farther she returned to the charge, in a seemingly unpremeditated manner. "May I ask how it happened that Miss Mansfield on leaving the Marchioness immediately found her way into your house?"

"The disagreement between them originated, I believe, in some imprudence on Emma's part, some letter unguardedly written—we could hardly, therefore, do otherwise than invite her."

"But for a time only, I hope? No permanent arrangement, surely?"

"It holds, I conclude, as long as shall be mutually agreeable," he replied, driving on still faster.

There was again a pause; a few more admiring ejaculations from her Grace at a new point of

view, then the significant inquiry, "Is Emma in the habit of spending her mornings apart with Miss Mansfield?"

"No, not constantly," was the answer, accompanied with an expression of annoyance, which was not lost upon the Duchess.

"I am glad to hear it," she rejoined; "I confess, this morning's proceedings rather alarmed me. It was an act of indiscretion which would have been really unpardonable in one more practised in the part of hostess."

"It is not an every-day occurrence, but it begins to happen more often than I could wish. I have a great dislike to the display of particular intimacies among ladies."

"So has every man of sense. For my own part, I have always entirely disapproved Emma's system of conduct in regard to Miss Mansfield, and I am happy to see that you begin to concur with me. There is no point in which my dear niece more needs the guidance of persons of mature judgment. Had she gone so far as to bestow an independent provision, I should not have blamed her. It would be, undoubtedly,

much more than Miss Mansfield is entitled to look for at her time of life; but it might not be unbecoming in circumstances like Emma's. But the attempt to elevate a person in that condition into the character of an intimate friend is preposterous! It is contrary to the very nature of things; the first requisite for free association is equality."

"I believe that to be very true, as a general rule. This case may perhaps form an exception."

"I really cannot see why," hastily interposed the Duchess. "Long as I have known Miss Mansfield, I am yet at a loss to discover what there is remarkable in her. She is not an accomplished woman; her attainments in that way are certainly mediocre. She does not pretend to deep reading. In what, then, does her superiority consist?"

In another temper of mind Lord Henry would have been at no loss how to answer this query; as it was he said nothing, leaving it to the Duchess to continue the discourse, which she did, in these words: "I really am quite ashamed of this romantic fancy of Emma's! it begins to be very

much remarked. Every body knows that the company assembled in the country, as we are here, is often of a mixed kind. You meet, not unfrequently, persons whom you may suppose to have been formerly connected with the family in some such capacity as Miss Mansfield's; and it is all very reasonable: for, in addition to a due sense of past services, there is considerable use in keeping up these subordinate acquaintances—they come in handily in various ways. But Emma's conduct goes much beyond that, as several of your friends have remarked to me. I will mention no names; but one, in particular, who knows the world extremely well, did not hesitate to ask me who that Miss Mansfield was with whom Lady Emma appeared to be so exceedingly intimate? They may well wonder! I do not believe such an instance was ever before heard of! A tutor is eligible to high preferment; but what can you ever make of a governess? It is impossible to raise her above her original station."

Still Lord Henry answered not; but her Grace took his silence as acquiescence, which in part it was.

"Confess now," said she; "do you not yourself see the necessity of severing this connexion?"

"I must own," he answered, "I have lately seen that it has its disadvantages. But I do not know how to act: Emma would feel the separation so keenly."

"What a pity your prudence did not preserve her from falling into such an error! Now, I grant, it is not so easy to repair. Yet something must be done; things cannot continue as they are. And I should decidedly advise you against half-measures. No compromise will answer, depend upon it! The parting should be final and entire! Miss Mansfield's dwelling in your park would be just the same as her continuing in your house."

"There would be little difference, I believe."

"None—really none! the intercourse would be constant; the confidential communication on the same footing as before."

Lord Henry at these words whipped his steeds so needlessly that the speaker clearly perceived she had touched on a particularly tender point, and used her advantage accordingly.

"It is a remark founded on universal experience,

that the deadliest foe to married happiness is a wife's dearest friend. And when the rank of the individual who plays that part is greatly inferior, the evils are multiplied tenfold. It is needful in such cases to be far-sighted: a few years hence it may be easy for Miss Mansfield to fix herself upon you in her old character. Are you aware how it is at present? She has undertaken the office of almoner!"

"Not with that name, I think. They were talking on the subject one day in London, but I did not hear them employ so grand a phrase. I know Miss Mansfield dispenses Emma's charities here; but that, considering her former acquaintance with the place, seems natural enough."

"It extends much beyond that, I assure you; it is all done in the regular official style of correspondence and inquiry."

"That seems to me superfluous in the case of private individuals," answered Lord Henry. "Of this at least I am sure, no man need employ an intermediate agent in almsgiving. How it may be with ladies I cannot presume to pronounce."

"Just the same; nothing can be easier. The

officials attached to public charities are always sufficiently on the alert to call in subscriptions; and with regard to private donations there is really no difficulty whatever. In short, I have known but one instance of such an assistant being employed. My poor friend Lady Hampton did try the experiment; and what was the result? The woman, it is notorious, defrauded her to a considerable amount."

As Lord Henry, dissatisfied and suspicious as he now was, could not imagine Catherine Mansfield imitating this example of peculation, he was not able to draw any practical inference from the fact. Indeed, quick as he ever was to see the ridiculous, the Duchess was in some danger of damaging her cause by bringing it forward. He began to be rather tired of the subject, and exerted himself to speak of something else, but it was in vain, she had an object in view from which she could not be diverted. He detained her for a moment, however, as she was about to alight, to say, very earnestly, "I cannot act hastily in this affair. I respect Miss Mansfield highly, notwithstanding all; and Emma clings to her as a mother."

"I should have thought I myself stood more in that relation!" replied the Duchess, with a very stately inclination of the head.

Lord Henry had nothing to reply: it was a blunder best covered by silence.

But her Grace, though for the moment affronted, was delighted with the results of her drive. A second time in her life she saw the way to effecting a great object, banishing this obnoxious Catherine Mansfield from her niece; and, as before, it called into play those powers of dexterity and *finesse* on which she particularly prided herself. She went to work with Mrs. Berners, to whom, as a friend, she condescended to intimate that in her peculiar position the companionship of a woman like Miss Mansfield would be highly advantageous. Mrs. Berners, though without the least intention of having any such associate, saw well enough that, in seeming to adopt the idea suggested by her Grace, she ran no risk of committing herself. It happened as she foresaw; Catherine politely, but decidedly, declined the offer. Nor was the Duchess at all disappointed; refusal served her design as well as consent. She represented it to Lord

Henry as a certain proof of Catherine's having determined to fasten herself on Beechwood for the remainder of her days. And he saw it in that light: his manner became rather cold—one half-hour was enough. Catherine's resolution was taken at once.

Her course was easy and direct. Mr. and Mrs. Rashleigh, bereft, not by death, but by happier occurrences, of all the numerous race which had sprung up at the Rectory, had for some time past urged her to come and be another daughter to their age. She now accepted their offer without further hesitation, thankful to have so true and good a motive to assign to Lady Emma for leaving her. But the latter penetrated deeper; she too had instantly noted the change in her husband's demeanour. Deeply pained, she could only trust herself to say, "If you really think you shall be happier there——" and then turned away to hide her tearful eyes.

Catherine left the Manor a few days before the departure of the noble owners. Her parting words were cheerful as well as affectionate: "Next summer, dear Emma, or next autumn at least!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WINDOWS were closed, gates securely fastened, apartments stripped of all movable decorations, all look of life and gaiety had vanished: the first residence of the Beauchamp-Langleys was ended; they had quitted Beechwood for perhaps six or eight months. And what benefits had resulted from their late abode? Lady Emma feared to ask herself that question; she left the Manor in very dejected spirits. But her husband was strong in a favourite theory. The inhabitants of Ardwell, he argued, must have found their means of living much augmented by his residence among them. This was undeniable; though the principal stream of his expenditure flowed back to London, many

articles of daily consumption must be had on the spot, and labour of various kinds was in constant requisition. Nevertheless, attentive observers might have doubted whether all the good thus rendered could compensate for some accompanying evils. The zealous endeavours of Mr. Rashleigh had brought his parishioners to a state as nearly approaching universal rectitude as any pastor can reasonably hope to witness. The distinction between right and wrong was clearly understood; the upright were respected by their neighbours, the erring humbled by the consciousness of their demerits. But this comparative purity and happiness, wrought by long labour, suffered serious injury in a very short period. What forty years had scarce sufficed to do was undone with but too much facility in four months. Miss Langley's household had never been immoderately numerous, and, growing old with her, became gradually steadier in habits. That of her successor was far larger, and imported much bad example into that rural district. Whilst he felicitated himself on the advantages he was dispersing around him, there was hardly a day

in which wife or parent had not to lament increasing signs of evil in husband or child, emulous of the fashions of the Manor. For this, had he known it, Lord Henry would not have held himself responsible, and yet in great measure he really was. Indolently reposing on the persuasion that the whole class of servants was corrupt, and that outward decency was the utmost which masters could reasonably hope to secure, he made no attempt to seek those of better principles. His household was, indeed, rather worse conducted than he concluded to be inevitable. His own thoughtless career, prior to marriage, attracted persons of indifferent character to his service: they believed that it was not likely to prove one very strictly regulated, and they did not find themselves mistaken. The old steward Unwin, whose word had been law in his late mistress's days, now found that he was at the head of an impudent set who laughed at and defied his orders, and could comfort himself only with a groan for the past "good times."

With the neighbouring gentry the new owners of Beechwood were not universally popular. There

were jealousies in the way. The airs of superior wealth assumed by their predecessor were easily borne by those who could on their side despise her meanness of extraction; but it suited ill with some people's pride to see the same advantage transferred to those who in loftiness of birth also stood far above themselves. The demeanour and aspect of the young husband and wife were indeed most engaging; but where prejudice is strong agreeable endowments sometimes conduce only to further irritation. Those who were resolved to see only blemishes were provoked by the commendations of others. Causes of offence arose out of the very means Lord Henry took to ensure popularity. He established a hunt at great expense; but a neighbouring association complained of his having trespassed on their rightful territories; and the difference, extending, as is usually the case, to other subjects, soon became acrimonious. He found himself the victim of annoyances he had made it his especial object to shun—people quarrelled with him, slandered him, impeded his recreations abroad, and troubled his quiet at home.

Nor did his departure silence the voice of malevolence; on the contrary, it facilitated the spreading many inaccurate reports. What he or his wife did or neglected to do, little as it was regarded in the larger circle in which they were now revolving, was much canvassed in the vicinity of their own country mansion. That neighbourhood had quite enough of those universally scattered pests of human comfort, professed gossips, to circulate malignant stories. And all were carried in the first instance to Ardwell Rectory. This was the especial care of two sisters—the one a widow, the other a spinster. Catherine absolutely dreaded their visits, so certain were they, whatever other topic might be started, to bring in some malicious allusion to our "great neighbours."

Because Mr. and Mrs. Rashleigh were the parents of the disappointed legatee, and because Miss Mansfield was supposed to have quitted the Manor on some slight or affront, nothing could persuade them that this species of discourse was not the most agreeable they could possibly maintain. How could the father of the supplanted

Mrs. Falconbridge fail to be pleased at hearing how ill the wealth which should have been hers was employed by its actual possessor—how likely it was to be greatly impaired, if not wholly dissipated, by his fatal addiction to the race-course and the gaming-table? Catherine and the good Rector, seeing through the motives of these talebearers, never attempted to point out the injustice of their censures; but Mrs. Rashleigh, the most simply charitable of human beings, sometimes prolonged the discussion painfully to her husband and her friend by endeavouring to place the news, which she imagined to be retailed merely from love of talking, in a more favourable point of view.

Intelligence arrived about midsummer that Lady Emma was a mother.

"But it's no heir," observed the maiden sister, with an exulting grin—"only a girl! My Lord and Lady, for once, must put up with a disappointment, like the rest of the world!"

A few faintly traced pencil lines came to Catherine's hand some days after:—

"I must and will write to you, my dearest of friends: I do so wish you were with me! My poor baby does not give perfect satisfaction to any one but me. Lord Donnington, I hear, is quite displeased at her not being a boy; and I don't think the Duchess fancies the having a great-niece. But she is so like her father! my nurse tells me she never saw so strong a likeness in one but a few days old. There may be a little flattery in that, but I do assure you it is very marked.

"Ever your gratefully affectionate

"E. B. L."

The event was the subject of much comment at the Rectory: Lady Emma hitherto had not been so mercilessly attacked as her husband, but this was too favourable an occasion to pass unimproved.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Rashleigh," said the widow, "I wonder what you will say to this! The baby-linen and all belonging to it was the most superb that ever was made or dreamed of: the people who provided it made it quite a show. My sister Johnson bought a frock for a godchild—mon-

strously dear, by the way—on purpose to get a sight of it. The Queen herself could hardly have had any thing finer! Indeed I make no question that her Majesty had always a better understanding than to take pleasure in such idle vanities. The sum it must have cost! Such exquisite lace! and used in such profusion! all Mechlin—you will observe, nothing British would serve her Ladyship! And yet, with all this, only one guinea to one maternity charity! Isn't it shocking?"

"There may be some mistake as to that——" began the Rector's wife.

"Mistake! quite impossible; I have it on the best authority."

"Well, as to the extravagance, at least we must consider that it is her first child—and there's a great deal in that."

As it happened that the widowed lady had never been a mother, she was not prepared with an immediate rejoinder to this apology. But fresh material for censorious remark was soon obtained. The poor infant, they understood, was very sickly, subject to convulsion-fits, and was often left in a state of considerable danger, while the heartless

mother was immersed in dissipation. It happened one day when they were declaiming on this theme that the following dialogue was held in Grosvenor Square—Lady Emma sat with her baby on her lap, the Duchess being her sole companion.

"Let me give you a gentle hint, my dear," said her Grace: "you act injudiciously in so frequently bringing her to her father. Beware of making him find her rather *de trop*."

"I always dismiss the nurse, and it is only for a few minutes at a time. But when he does take her in his arms I feel so happy!"

The Duchess smiled. "Your dear mother revived," said she; "she pursued exactly the same system with you—rather against my advice, I own. But then it happened that Lord Carisbrooke had also a fancy for children, which does not appear to be exactly the case with Henry."

"He is not yet so fond of her as I am, but I hope he soon will be: I often observe fathers of a humble class nursing their babies almost as tenderly as the mothers."

"The effect of dire necessity: a man condemned to all the plagues which infancy imposes,

naturally tries to extract what amusement he can from it. The feeling may probably, by way of compensation, be stronger in the lower orders."

"The lower orders!" repeated Lady Emma; "surely rather the higher, if in them the best affections of human nature are most powerful."

"My dear," replied her Grace, looking in smiling surprise on her animated countenance, "you really become quite eloquent on this favourite theme! But don't blame your husband; it is not peculiar to him not to be sensible of the attractions of little babies; it is so with most men, and with many of our own sex too. I myself acknowledge I never much admire them. Ill-dressed, they are the most shocking little objects imaginable; and after all, do the best you can, which I grant you have done, what is your darling there, but a full-sized doll?"

"Much more I think," said the young mother; "there is a dawn of intelligence already. And her features are so like Henry's! that will be exactly his nose—just that fine, Grecian outline."

"Will be!" said the Duchess, laughing; "I am glad you do not go so far as to pronounce it

a nose already. But it is growing late. You are coming with me to Twickenham, I hope?"

"No; I am waiting to see Dr. Campbell. I am not quite easy about her."

"The nurse's report might be very well taken in such a case, I think," said the Duchess, drily. "But this is not the first time that you have shut yourself up on this account."

"Last Wednesday, you mean. I could not leave her, she seemed to me quite feverish."

The Duchess's countenance expressed something beyond contempt. "As you please," said she; "only if you do find cause to regret forsaking your husband, do not accuse me of not having given you warning!"

Lady Emma's look was first that of wonder, then of positive terror. Her blanched cheeks told the Duchess that she had gone too far. Not being of a sensitive nature, and having had the happiness of being united to a man of whose unwavering constancy Jealousy herself could never have harboured a doubt, she was not prepared for the effect her hint produced on one so differently constituted, and not quite so well circumstanced.

"Do not fall into needless panic," said the Duchess; "there is nothing to be apprehended now."

Lady Emma answered not. Her alarm had been but that of an instant; but she was acutely pained for her husband's sake that she had betrayed such a feeling.

The Duchess spoke again, soothingly, "All I meant, was a gentle caution. There has been lately an unavoidable separation; but that being over, he may naturally wonder that you should like to prolong it on so frivolous a pretext. Consider what he is. His position is wonderfully little altered. Marriage is usually a humbling downfall to man's vanity—and so much the better!—but it really is not so with him; he is still followed, still courted. What, then, must he think of a wife who foregoes her privilege of accompanying him, because an infant a few weeks old looks a little redder or paler than usual?" She paused to give her arguments the greater weight, and then added, "And on your own account, my love, let me remonstrate. Society would suffer grievously, if all young mothers thought themselves

obliged to adopt your system. Matrimony, in that case, would be a serious step indeed!"

The last suggestion passed unheeded, the foregoing sank deep. Dreading lest her husband should for an instant imagine his child to be his rival in her affections, Lady Emma, with strength hardly regained, gave her country censors the satisfaction of finding her name enumerated at almost every party in the remainder of the season, and of denouncing her, on this incontestable proof, of being the most utterly regardless of maternal duty among all women of fashion!

CHAPTER XXIX.

LADY EMMA probably paid the penalty of the gaieties against which her neighbours inveighed so bitterly, for her health failed, and her physician prescribed a stay of some length at Tunbridge. Other engagements intervening, it was not till late in October that orders arrived at the Manor to prepare for the speedy return of the family.

The whole season had been remarkably fine, but the 25th of the month was a day to be chronicled as something marvellous. The atmosphere seemed tempered to the enjoyment not only of the healthful, but even to invalids of every description. Nature seemed suddenly to have paused in her periodical work of destruction;

myriads of insects awoke from their semi-torpid existence again to dance in giddy mazes, as in another summer's day; the leaves, which a less genial temperature had already curled and crisped, retained yet their feeble hold on the spray.

In the afternoon of that brilliant day there stood at an upper window of Ardwell Rectory a very rare visitant, once its happy inmate, Mrs. Falconbridge. A view spread before her rich in beauty; the sloping lawn beneath, graced by noble trees, cedar, beech, and ash, afforded broken glimpses of a most pleasing scene beyond—white-washed cottages scattered up and down on the uneven ground, intersected with orchards and gardens, while, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, Beechwood extended far as the eye could reach, all glorious in the many tints which marked the age of the year.

Such a prospect might long have entranced the gaze even of a stranger, still more that of one to whom each object had the dear charm of early remembrance; but it was at the moment unheeded: a painful anxiety absorbed the beholder. Two

happy days, the first for many years, had she spent with her parents and with Catherine: on the third, the preceding evening, as they sat together in the twilight, there came suddenly over all a sense of gloom; unexpected and undesired, Colonel Falconbridge stood among them. How mournfully changed! was the parents' secret thought. How had those years of chafing against his evil destiny and his fellow-men told upon that fine frame, those handsome features! Grieving inwardly that his coming should thus break in upon the very short space for which he allowed them the solace of their daughter's presence, they yet did their best to welcome him; but their efforts were thrown away. Why he came, or how long he proposed to stay, he vouchsafed not to intimate, and none dared inquire: enough it was that, for some purpose known to himself only, there he was. This morning, about half an hour before, he had gone out; and his wife, from whom he had parted in that room, had remained ever since lost in a sombre reverie. It was dissipated at last by the entrance of Catherine, whose countenance, animated by the delights of the

weather, presented a striking contrast to the sad abstraction visible on that of her friend.

Mrs. Falconbridge spoke with a deep sigh: "He is gone—I knew he came for that—to Broomhill, to Marshall!"

Catherine started, and there was an instantaneous change in her look; but it presently passed away.

"It is to be regretted," said she; "they can but talk on a subject irritating to her mind, poor old woman! and very injurious to his. But that is all —do not let it vex you too much!"

"If that *were* all; but that is not my worst dread. He has been going all over it again and again! my head aches with the talking—the vain effort to make him see things aright." And again she sighed wearedly, which was not her wont.

Catherine was perplexed as well as grieved.

"What do you mean," she asked, "by having any thing to dread? Sad as it is, it is past at least."

"Not in his mind: I fear it never will be. There is a fatal tendency in our nature, you know, which gives to any thought continually dwelt upon an overpowering mastery. For the last two years he

has brooded over a wild suggestion till he has come to believe it rational. Do you remember his insisting on seeing that miserable death-bed?"

"I never can forget it!"

"Did you know what Marshall then said to him?"

"In my presence she said not a word: she was trembling, quite overawed by his manner. But I do now recollect that she followed him; only for a moment, however."

"It was enough to do irreparable mischief, I fear. She told him that she had that sheet of paper which gave all to me still in her keeping, and would place it in his hands if he chose. At the time he was as well aware as you could be of its utter uselessness, and told her so rather roughly. But as time went on he became impressed with the idea that there had been fraudulent dealing in regard to the second will, and that he might succeed in proving the fact. This dream it is which has brought him to England: he has come over expressly to see her. He told me so just now; and he is gone

there: nothing that I could say would dissuade him!"

"I am very sorry! but it can do no lasting harm. Any conversation with her must convince him of the hopelessness of the attempt. She must know, unless she has come to dotage—in which case her testimony would be inadmissible—that nothing can shake the validity of the second will."

But while speaking thus she saw that there was some other fear not yet disclosed.

"He went *that* way," said Mrs. Falconbridge, pointing to Beechwood. "And *they* were to come last night, were they not?"

"They were, and did, as I hear; but, my dear Maria, do but consider—the path he would take through the woods is two miles at least from the house—how little chance is there that they should meet!"

"I wish it were impossible! as yet they never have seen each other."

"Nor will they now! believe me, nothing can be less likely. You are giving way to groundless terrors. Come out with me; the air will relieve you."

"Is the air reviving to day? I cannot feel it so. I know not how it is, but never in all my trials have I felt so deep a depression! It seems like a foreboding!"

"You must not yield to such fancies. Which way shall we go?"

"To the church, if any where: I may not be here on Sunday; and I must see it again."

And through the winding shrubbery, across the plank-bridge, spanning that same rivulet which trickled near the Old Manor, they proceeded to their object.

Ardwell Church was not remarkable externally for beauty of architecture; but within it possessed uncommon attractions for the curious in the past: a large chapel adjoining the chancel being literally crowded with tributes to the various families who had succeeded each other in possession of Beechwood Manor, from the twelfth century down to the present time. Brasses more or less legible studded the ground; the walls and pillars were encrusted with tablets; rude rough-hewn biers of stone, but little elevated above the ground, contrasted strikingly with the towering canopy of

marble, gilded, painted, and elaborately wrought, beneath which reposed in effigy a knight and dame who had graced the court of Elizabeth. Other trophies of the Destroyer's dominion hung aloft; huge hatchments, darkening more than one window—some in a state of rather perilous decay, the framework half parting from the fading emblazonry.

The eyes of Mrs. Falconbridge were first attracted to that altar at which she had pronounced a vow which, in the capacity of wife at least, had not ensured her after felicity; though that was more than she could bear to admit, even to herself. Her gaze turned next on the only novelty the sacred precincts contained, a handsome mural monument. Lord Henry had entrusted the charge of his benefactress's epitaph to Mr. Selby, whose fluent pen had not been sparing in eulogium. She who now perused it could hardly have endorsed the panegyric. It told of "a long life dignified by unexampled munificence," "a name for ever dear to the inhabitants of this place," and of sundry high-sounding excellences with which, even when most partial to the departed, she had never been

able to imagine her to be adorned. Without remark upon it, she spoke of the effect the entire scene produced on her mind.

"I cannot agree with those who, unreservedly, condemn the erection of monuments in a church; they seem to me to answer a very beneficial purpose. As records of the brevity of human suffering, they preach eloquently to succeeding generations. Look at these dates"—pointing to one in memory of a widowed mother's only child: "forty years between their deaths! but it is over—long over; so will it be with us all!"

"I think they tend to other good uses," answered Catherine: "the over-strained praise we read on some only tends to make us feel the more forcibly its utter nothingness. Even the labours of the herald above have that tendency with me, though it is not their object."

At that moment a key was turned at the principal entrance-door. Concealed themselves by a pillar, they saw a group of ladies ushered in by the old man who combined the offices of clerk and sexton. That Catherine recognized the foremost was at once apparent to her friend. For an

instant she herself looked earnestly, and then said, in a whisper, "I see it is Lady Emma: do you go and meet her. I will retreat as we came, by this door."

But Catherine replied, in the same under-tone, "Not now—with all those strangers."

They withdrew together accordingly. The thought did cross Catherine's mind that, somehow, it always occurred to these, her two dearest friends, to come against each other, from the least to the greatest events of their lives. The oppression which had weighed so heavily on Mrs. Falconbridge's spirits settled down again as soon as they were without the sacred walls, and Catherine, finding it vain to attempt diverting her thoughts from the one engrossing subject, herself recurred to it.

"It is strange that Marshall should be in possession of that document. Why was it not destroyed when the other was executed?"

"Better far that it had been; it could answer no good purpose to preserve it," answered Mrs. Falconbridge. "But that poor woman's zealous attachment always carried away her judgment.

She told me, when she came to see us after her mistress's death, that it would have gone into the fire the same hour in which the second was drawn up, but that she 'so begged and prayed' that she might keep it, for 'old times' sake,' that at last Miss Langley, tired out, said, 'Well, then, she might if she liked, for there was neither good nor harm in it now.'"

The party who remained within the church were far differently circumstanced from those who had withdrawn: young and prosperous, it was to them no more than any other curious sight never before seen. Old Jervis discharged his office of cicerone with a doggedness of manner altogether peculiar to the occasion. Holding the Rector in high veneration, he made a principle, for his daughter's sake, of disliking the new family at the Manor most heartily. This feeling induced him to render his accustomed recapitulation as dry and unentertaining as he possibly could. Lady Emma, who had heard many particulars from Catherine, was a little provoked at his behaviour.

"He is not doing justice to his theme," she remarked to one of her companions: "he gives

us only names and dates. I assure you, this church abounds with interesting recollections."

"It certainly is remarkable," answered the lady, "that so many distinct families should have passed away."

"There is an old legend connected with it," replied Lady Emma; "I cannot exactly remember it: I will ask our guide."

The old man, usually diffuse on this marvellous tale, which he regarded as the foundation of all his other stories, had suppressed it altogether, as too good for his present auditory. On its being specially demanded, however, he recounted it at large, and with more animation than his previous narrations had promised. The ladies listened with due attention; and she to whom Lady Emma had spoken remarked at its conclusion,—

"So, then, the estate is to change owners till it comes into hands worthy to retain it? We may well hope, then, it will rest where it is!" with a smile to Lady Emma.

A slight inclination of the head acknowledged the compliment, but there was a pensive expression on the countenance.

"I had forgotten that it had a moral," gravely replied the wife of the existing Lord of the Manor.

When about to leave the church one of the party noticed the font, which, though very handsome, was evidently not coeval with the edifice itself.

In answer to inquiries as to the date, their conductor replied, "Fifteen years." Adding, pointedly, "It was presented by the late Miss Langley at the baptism of her godson, Colonel Falconbridge's son, that was to have had the Manor itself in time, if all had gone right."

Lady Emma coloured, and turned away. While her companions were in the act of resuming their places in the carriages, she proposed to them, since they all professed themselves pleased with what they had seen, to continue their researches into ecclesiastical antiquities.

"There is a beautiful old church about ten miles distant," she said: "a drive there will occupy all the rest of the morning; but perhaps we could not find a more agreeable excursion."

It was carried in the affirmative at once, and

Lady Emma gave directions accordingly. She then returned to their guide, the cause of whose sullenness she now fully understood. Putting a liberal gratuity into his hand, she said, with a manner unaffectedly conciliatory, "I admire your fine old church more each time I enter it: I shall soon be almost as much attached to it as you are."

The old man's eyes glistened; for, born in that village, he was much disposed to believe that a more stately structure could not be found in all England, and of course, if not there, nowhere else upon earth. Calling to mind, however, who the speaker was, he did his utmost not to be pleased, nor could bring himself to acknowledge the donation otherwise than by a half-choked "Thank your Ladyship." But Lady Emma could forgive the prejudice of an untutored mind, the rather in respect to his thin, blanched hairs.

"You have held your office long, I suppose?" she said.

"Ay, my Lady, forty year and upward." And, pointing to the churchyard with his ponderous keys, old Jervis added, in a tone that sounded like gloomy pride,—

"I've seen to the making of many a score of those graves yonder."

Lady Emma shuddered ; she had not thought of his sepulchral duties, and his manner of alluding to them shocked her feelings. But making one more effort to overcome his hostility, she proceeded, hastily,—

"I should hope you have attended as many christenings as funerals! We shall soon have occasion for your services in that way—my little girl is to be baptized next week."

With these words she quitted him ; and soon the train of carriages was in motion. The sexton having watched it out of sight, stood rubbing the coin on the sleeve of his coat, though assuredly a brighter had never come into his hands. But he was moody, searching into the recesses of his mind. How was it with him just then? Conscience acquitted him of being seduced by love of lucre from what he deemed the integrity of his principles. If the Lady of the Manor had bewitched him, it was by a spell more potent with a heart of rough honesty than that of gold. Hitherto he had stubbornly dis-

puted with his neighbours the attractions of her person and demeanour. But now he had himself heard her accents, had looked, askance though it were, upon her face, and had found the charm irresistible! Provoked to find himself thus captivated, he did all in his power to refresh his animosity. He read over the inscription on Miss Langley's monument; but even that stimulus failed. He gazed on the font, recalling the image of his honoured Rector's daughter as she stood there, so beautiful and so glad, with her first-born son "that was to have had the Manor;" but still it would not do. He detected in himself a lurking interest in that other fair young mother, even though the babe she was to present had for a father the usurping Lord Henry.

CHAPTER XXX.

MRS. FALCONBRIDGE derived little benefit from her visit to the church; her temples seemed but to throb the more. The unexpected entrance of Lady Emma, though of what she had sometimes called her "enmity" not a trace remained, had affected her painfully, it tended to strengthen the undefined dread of evil which already haunted her mind. Catherine now left her in solitude, joining Mr. and Mrs. Rashleigh in the garden, and again she took her station at the window—the one thought was still "When will he return?" Her eyes, wearied even to aching with gazing towards Beechwood, found now and then a transient relief in wandering to the village: she sometimes caught sight of a passenger less

troubled, perhaps, than herself—the fancy was soothing. Children, more than man or woman, helped to beguile the care at her heart, for in theirs she could hope there might be none at all. Suddenly, as she watched a group of boys whose merry laughter reached her even at a considerable distance, there struck across her sight, as it were, a figure on horseback, rather rushing than galloping past the half-stripped trees. So rapid was his passage that she could descry only that he did pass, of his age or station she could form no guess.

"Dangerous," she thought, "that rate of speed, even in a place so thinly peopled as this!"

Presently, another noticeable circumstance arrested her attention, two men running in the same direction whence the horseman came, another, and another—what might it mean? Her whole frame shook; with trembling steps she gained the door, descended the stairs, and entering the garden, looked anxiously around for Catherine, who joined her quickly, unperceived by the Rector or his wife.

"Did you see him, Catherine? that horseman—

so very fast! and those men running—oh, do come with me; I must know!"

Catherine, alarmed more for her than at what she had told, hastened with her into the village. It was straggling, but there was a cluster of cottages near the Rectory, all of which now seemed deserted. At length a young woman approached, her whole care engaged by a clamorous infant in her arms. They addressed her, however, asked if any misfortune had happened; and the "Yes," given amidst the outcries of the baby, was torturing. Mrs. Falconbridge could not inquire further, but Catherine did, and heard, by a word at a time, as only it could be spoken, that there had been an accident, a fall in hunting, and that the sufferer was Lord Henry. It was she who was now deprived of the power of speech: Mrs. Falconbridge regained hers, and Catherine, horror-stricken as she was, saw an instantaneous expression on her face as of that of relief. But in the next second it had changed into another more natural.

"My dear Catherine," she said, "perhaps it is not true; I will ask more."

The woman had entered her cottage; she had

told in those few words all she knew. But now a crowd, it seemed as of the whole inhabitants collected together, were seen advancing towards them, and likewise a train of horsemen: it flashed on Catherine's recollection that this was the first meet of the Beechwood hounds! Encompassed by the riders, a carriage appeared; it came on at an almost funereal pace, and when opposite the Rectory halted altogether. Mrs. Falconbridge pressed forward to ask if life remained. The friend nearest the carriage, no other than Hugh Melton, answered in the affirmative, but said that the intense pain occasioned by the motion of the vehicle obliged them to pause frequently for several minutes. They almost despaired of his reaching the Manor alive.

"Let him be brought in here," she said: and thankfully did Mr. Melton accept the offer. Relief from the acute pain caused by the act of transportation had considerable effect. When borne into the house, Lord Henry was nearly insensible; but when carefully laid on a couch in one of the ground-floor rooms, he soon opened his eyes, and faintly asked, "Where am I?"

"In Ardwell Rectory," answered his friend.

"There!" he rejoined, in an accent which proved that his senses were perfectly collected: "Miss Mansfield, is she here?"

Hugh Melton looked expressively at Catherine, whom he had often seen at the Manor. Upon his mute appeal she summoned courage to draw near the couch, and behold the traces of that short but severe agony. She almost doubted whether, if not previously apprized, she could have recognized those well-known lineaments in their present fearful contraction. He took her hand, chilled by the sudden horror, into his own, burning with new-kindled fever, pressed it fervently, and by that action testified that he was comforted by finding her near: Mrs. Falconbridge with assiduous dexterity adjusted the pillows supporting his head.

"Whose kind hands are these?" he asked.

"It is Mr. Rashleigh's daughter," answered Catherine, forbearing to utter the name of Falconbridge; but he conjectured the truth.

"That daughter?" he said, with marked emphasis; and receiving no answer, looked

earnestly upon her. All the past was evidently full in his recollection.

"Forgive me!" he said. "Very soon it will be——"

A surgeon entered at the moment, brought by the horseman who had ridden so desperately. As yet the nature and extent of the injury were unknown. In an adjoining room Catherine and Maria awaited the report; the latter weeping violently, the former with tearless eyes restlessly pacing the room, oppressed with a vague sense of having something yet more terrible to encounter. The coming of Lady Emma was that climax of misery; but she hardly knew it. A slight noise was heard without, a footstep on the gravel-path; half-blinded with tears as she was, Mrs. Falconbridge looked and saw her husband! Again there was a deep sense of thankfulness at her heart: that meeting—that ungoverned wrath—that fatal affray, had been but the vision of her disordered fancy; in this strange, terrible crisis of fate her husband was in no way involved. She saw but a glimpse of his face as he passed through the garden;

it had its usual moody expression—only that. Did he know? had he already heard? She could not go to him—could not ask—could not endure to call forth sentiments which it was too certain would not be altogether in unison with her own. Catherine, spent with fatigue and sorrow, sank on a chair, but her eyes remained fixedly directed towards the room they had left. The surgeon came forth at length.

"Well, sir?" Mrs. Falconbridge contrived to articulate.

He shook his head, and replied, mournfully, "Nothing can be hoped. There may be some protraction—a few hours, perhaps; even that depends on perfect stillness: he must not move. I have done the little that can be done, and will wait here within call."

"Catherine," said Mrs. Falconbridge, in faltering accents, "I can bear it best: I will go in——"

The suggestion roused Catherine from a half-paralyzed condition. "No, no!" she answered; but the surgeon decided the question: he had been charged to request they would both return. Lord Henry on seeing them immediately exclaimed,—

"Tell me what you have heard—that gentleman is too cautious, he would not speak out."

They could not reply: he understood their silence.

"You have answered me. What need I ask? I feel!"

There was a deep, solemn pause. How dared they intrude on the thoughts of the doomed man? how, in their profound sense of his awful position, even turn their eyes upon him? His own were closed: he lay motionless.

It was come, then, the close of that brief career, which to himself as to others had seemed so eminently bright and fortunate. What was the retrospection? Was it the being so early called on to resign those high advantages that he deplored? No; but the having possessed them. For now, as by a lightning-flash, he saw how utterly they had been misused! Favourite objects, but that morning pursued with intense eagerness, shrank into their relative insignificance; duties till then thought to have been well enough fulfilled, rose before him in their real, awful magnitude. Now did he first understand the true

value of mortal being, and now was he called to enter on a state unknown! No space remained for reparation; the errors he so bitterly bewailed he might not hope to be permitted to amend. He had suppressed with manly fortitude all manifestation of his severe bodily pain, but the intensity of mental suffering could not be so well supported, the anguish of the spirit extorted at last a low but deep groan. Mrs. Falconbridge gently withdrew, and in an instant returned with her father, then, accompanied by Catherine, again left the room. The voice of the venerable Pastor recalled the sufferer from a trance of horror. By many a death-bed had he stood, often had he witnessed the agonies of a late awakened conscience, but never, perhaps, had his sympathies been so powerfully called forth as now. What passed between them in the following hour may not be told. It is enough to say that, if all those of previous life had been thoughtlessly wasted, this at least was well improved.

They were ended. Faith and Hope had bound together in Holy Communion the living and

the dying. *They* looking on *him* saw with thankful joy the blessed result—no unnatural elation, no delirious excitement: an expression of profound contrition rather, but no longer verging on despair. To the aged father, too much overcome with all he had heard and said to remain longer, he bade adieu, with a fervently uttered, "I thank you!" the daughter, as she was about to follow, he detained by a look of entreaty.

"One last request," he said: "when my wife"—his voice was for a moment totally lost—"when *she* comes," he resumed with great effort, "she will need to be prepared—will *you* tell her? Spare me the sight of her first sorrow! I know it will be painful," he added, seeing that she did not immediately reply; "but you are yourself a wife—will you refuse?"

"Oh, no!" she cried, unable to utter more.

"Heaven bless you for bringing me here!" he concluded, as, again bathed in tears, she left him with none but Catherine. All was profoundly still, but for that sound of painful breathing which interrupted from time to time his sad

companion's supplications on his behalf. Pausing, as she did, more frequently as time went on, she knew not to what length, it was a relief to her to hear her name, spoken as it was in accents certainly weaker, more hollow.

"I am not much worse," he said, in answer to her gaze of anxiety. "I think I shall live to see her!"

"Live to see her!" from whom he had parted but a few hours before in youth, health, strength, joy! What a world is this on which to rest!

"I must speak to you!" he said, earnestly. "I am very anxious for her—you know her: you know what this blow will be to her. Dreadful apprehensions have come into my mind. I fear for her reason, for her life! It is upon you, under Divine mercy, that I rely. Return to her, I entreat, and never leave her again! The hope that you will is all my comfort. Let nothing induce you to abandon her! Tell them that I consigned her to you. She is dear to me beyond expression! If I see her not, bear her that assurance! The child," he added, a moment afterwards, "poor little innocent! if I could see her *now!*"

How much was implied in that last word Catherine did not fully know, but the strong emphasis was very affecting.

"You will remember my charge—you *will* accept it?" he resumed, fixing his eyes anxiously on hers.

"I will never leave her, if not at her own wish," she replied.

"That is much," he answered, gratefully; "but I have more to say."

And then again he paused to gather his remaining strength. She bent down to distinguish every syllable: not one escaped her.

"Her love to me has been that of an angel before and since our marriage. She would have given her very life that I should lead mine aright. But I resisted—I sought to lower her to myself. It is past—it would be vain to recall it, but that it should prove to her what I was. She could not amend me. Charge her, then, by the love she bore me, not to deplore my doom! Had it been deferred, it had but been more awful. I know now how I should have lived—but I know it only because I am about to die. Had longer life been granted, the account to render would have been

heavier. Repeat all this faithfully; nothing else will truly comfort her. Tell her I died in penitence, in thankfulness, acknowledging the mercy of my sentence!"

These parting injunctions were given slowly, with great and increasing difficulty, but with firm determination. The speaker's whole soul breathed in them, but his last accents were little above a whisper. Catherine in much alarm called in the surgeon, who strictly enjoined silence and quiet, and intimated to her, by an expressive glance, that he saw a marked change in his unhappy patient. The latter, himself fully aware of this, became restlessly anxious.

"Why does she not come?" he asked: "where is she?"

Catherine was obliged to reply that Lady Emma, unfortunately, had not been found at home, and that it was uncertain whither she had gone.

"Then I shall never see her more!" he answered, in deep despondency.

"Messengers have been despatched in every direction," Catherine replied, soothingly; but he only sighed profoundly. Returning to the window,

she gazed without—so the intensely anxious do, as though they could accelerate what they desire! The sense of hearing exerted to the utmost, agitated her continually with hope and fear. The rustling of the breeze, the noise of a watermill, the rumbling of a cart, even the passing of a single horseman, were in turn mistaken for the signals of Lady Emma's approach. For a time the dying husband listened also, with an eagerness still more intense. Though the couch on which he lay was at some distance from the window, his ear caught each faint sound more quickly than hers.

"Is not that a carriage? Now, surely, it is coming! There, do you hear that?" were exclamations uttered repeatedly, with forced and feverish strength, till at length his voice sank again into that extreme feebleness by which she had been before alarmed.

"I can listen no more!" he said, mournfully.

The effort had become too painful. His eyes, closed—a threatening torpor seemed to be creeping over his senses. Catherine's anxiety increased as

his own thus subsided; she feared to behold him sink into a state of utter insensibility. The cattle of a neighbouring farm were driven past the house—she had seen them in the early morning, and heard then, as now, the whistling of the boy cowherd. The sound brought back a flood of recollections: how she had wakened particularly happy, rejoicing in the having her dear friend with her, overshadowed though her presence had been by the coming of her husband; how she had anticipated with delight the being soon at the Manor, and seeing the baby, the new object of love! A cold shudder ran through her frame, with a vain longing that all could be as it then was—the day's frightful wretchedness undreamed of!

Once again a sound was audible, unlike all to which she had before listened; nearer—nearer it drew; the suspense was brief—a carriage entered the garden gates! Approaching the couch, she gently said, "She is come!"

The words at once aroused Lord Henry from his half-dormant condition; it had been the exhaustion of pain, not the stupor of benumbed intellect. He partly raised his head from the pillow—he was

unable to sustain the effort, but his gaze continued steadfastly fixed on the door.

"Do not leave us at first," he said; "she may want support."

There was a short interval, occasioned doubtless by the preparatory intimation he had requested Mrs. Falconbridge to impart, then a hurried step was heard—in the next instant Lady Emma appeared. Her countenance expressed the liveliest affliction; not absolute despair. But the instant her eyes rested on their object the truth forced itself on her conviction. She neither shrieked nor wept, but, pausing in her eager advance, wrung her hands in unutterable woe! This mute passion was almost too much for the beholders to endure. The husband who had prayed to be spared to bid her farewell, now wished that he had died without seeing the intensity of her sorrow. He looked earnestly upon Catherine, recalling thus to her memory the injunctions he had lately given. The latter hitherto, by great effort, had maintained outward composure, but that appeal completely overpowered her. One single, deep sob broke the stillness of the room. She withdrew into that adjoining.

"Come to me, dear Emma!" said Lord Henry, when they were alone.

She came, bent over him, but forbore an embrace. There was no bandage, no ghastly token of a wound: she knew not the seat of the deadly injury; her lightest touch might inflict additional suffering. He understood it well.

"Do you think I fear your clasp, my love?" he said: "I have longed for it!"

But she could not be emboldened to so fearful a risk, she only took his hands to press them to her heart, then kissed alternately the parched lips, the brow on which a cold damp had already settled. Her tender caresses penetrated his soul; he had hardly dared to hope he might receive them. The unexpected joy, more potent than all the restoratives of medical art, infused a transient vigour into his exhausted frame. The sense of suffering was deadened in the strong desire to live, still to enjoy the blessedness of her affection; the thought glanced through his mind, "Perhaps I shall not die!"

But the delusion was but that of a moment; for that space only could he doubt his inevitable and fast approaching fate; and with that conviction

returned the solemn resolve to render to his Creator the only sacrifice now in his power—an obedient, unmurmuring spirit.

"Let me look upon you, dearest," he said.

She raised her face from his; he gazed on it intently

"How thankful I am to see you once more!" was the natural expression of his feelings. But the sense thus conveyed of his immediate danger was insupportable; her grief became passionate—ungovernable. Hitherto, he had lain motionless, content passively to exchange this last farewell. But when her anguish at length found words, when she lavished upon him the fondest epithets, when her tears fell fast and faster on his face, the cautions enjoined upon him, the necessity of which he but too well understood, could be no longer heeded. With a desperate effort he raised himself from his recumbent position, and, regardless of the torture the movement occasioned, clasped her to his breast, exclaiming, "My wife, my Emma, my dear, dear wife!"

But the penalty was instantly paid. Ere yet she had time to fear, she felt his arms relax, his

head sink heavily on her shoulder. The frame that morning so firm in manly vigour, was now feebler than her own. She endeavoured to sustain him, but finding herself unequal to the attempt, uttered a wild, piercing cry for help. All in the adjoining room at once rushed in. But their sympathy was vain. To what human skill, what human tenderness, was it ever given to arrest, for one instant, the flight of the summoned spirit?

The sufferer was beyond the succour of his brother man. But she, his wife, could not believe it; she continued to repeat in accents which pierced the hearts of all who heard them,—

"Oh, help him, revive him, he has fainted!"

But she proved, even while thus speaking, by the frantic passion with which she clung to the inanimate form, that she was conscious it was no longer susceptible of injury. They vainly tried to detach her from it till her senses failed—till her frame lost, in a long convulsive shudder, the unnatural energy of despair. Sinking then upon the corpse, she became for a time no less unconscious of misery.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE eighth day since Beechwood had become the house of death was dawning. Two watchers noted its approach. One, an old man now, but still vigorous in frame and mind, as he sat in perfect stillness, recalled in vivid memory a scene which had passed in that very chamber some sixteen years before. Here had Dr. Percival witnessed Miss Langley's first, rash will: here was he painfully impressed with the utter vanity of the second! Never, in his long professional career, had he passed through a week so trying to his humanity. Delirious outbreaks of sorrow, long fits of total stupefaction, now and then a few instants of broken sleep—in alternations only of these had the weary days crept on. But now, once again,

his patient's eyelids had closed, as she reclined on a couch, supported by the tenderest of nurses. Each felt how much depended on the continuance of that slumber. They scarcely dared to breathe; they dreaded the fall of a coal on the hearth, the birds' awakening carol—it almost seemed as if the very looks of hope they exchanged with each other would break the spell. More than all were to be feared certain sounds below. Those studiously cautious, stealthy steps, that restrained murmur of voices, the frequent opening and shutting of doors, gently as the act was performed—all these were sure tokens of the preparation for interment. Should she awake to hear them! "Oh that that may not be!" was Catherine's fervent prayer. Dr. Percival, as he watched the sleeper's countenance, felt more hopeful: he ventured at last to rise, and stand beside her.

"What a pang it must have cost him to leave her!" he thought, with deep compassion, as he gazed on the fair young face, sweet in expression even now, with the traces of heart-rending anguish still uneffaced.

Catherine dared not allow herself to think; an

attempt to measure the depth of such woe must destroy her own composure, essential to the soothing rest of the sufferer sustained in her arms. Another sound was heard; he frowned; she held her breath, as a man's step approached the door. They could not doubt whose it was—that of the Duke of Delaval, anxious before proceeding on his sad fraternal duty to ascertain, by his own hearing, the present condition of his unhappy sister-in-law. Their fears were partly realized; the footsteps were not unheard: the slumberer started, extended her arms, and again pronounced the name of "Henry," not as hitherto, in wild exclamations, but rather as if some blessed illusion held her entranced, a dream of life and joy. But, happily, she was not thoroughly aroused, her senses were too heavily oppressed; again she sank on the couch, and Catherine availed herself of the partial movement to lay her down in a position more likely to ensure complete repose. With stiffened limbs she herself arose, as the listening brother withdrew, lightly as man can tread. The good Doctor pressed her hand in earnest sympathy, and as he left the room pointed significantly to another couch. But she

sought not rest: proceeding softly to the adjoining dressing-room, she so far withdrew a window-curtain as to have a view of what was about to pass without. There was no remarkable degree of state, the family of the deceased had enough of sense to dislike any great display of funereal pomp, yet nearly an hour elapsed before all was completed, and her tearful eyes rested on the narrow bier, borne from the mansion of which its tenant had been so lately the much envied lord. Through the grey haze of the autumnal morning she traced the long sable line winding along the beautiful domain; horses and plumes now partially disappearing in the declivities of the route, emerging again on higher ground. Long after she knew that it could be seen no more did she remain fixed to the same spot, bewildered in sorrow, hardly yet able to realize the fact of the late terrible catastrophe. But a slight movement in the adjoining apartment at once recalled her to the dear charge confided to her by the deceased; she re-entered it. Lady Emma had already awaked—already had she proved that redoubled intensity of pain which follows the first forgetfulness of misfortune. But

blessed had been the effect of her short slumber—the mind was clear. The folded hands revealed that the lately happy wife knew that she was widowed, and meekly sought for help to sustain her exceeding grief. No word, no movement betrayed the presence of another; but when the silent prayer was concluded Catherine drew near, to feel that the hand she fondly took no longer told of fever.

"Have I been sleeping long?" Lady Emma faintly asked.

"About three hours."

"I ought to be very thankful: I am so refreshed!" After a long pause she said, distinctly, though in the same weakened accents, "My poor baby! let me see her."

"Are you really equal to it?"

"Yes, indeed, now."

Catherine found the nurse sleeping soundly, and so also the infant; a slight murmur as she lifted it up was easily stilled, and soon it was in the mother's arms. It was embraced with intense fondness, but the ray of joy was presently overcast.

"Tell me," said Lady Emma, anxiously, "have I not seen her before this?"

"Once—an error of mine; I brought her too soon."

"I remember it all—the wild, wicked things I said! May Heaven forgive me!"

"You were not then accountable."

Lady Emma answered only with a very deep sigh. For some time she lay silent, gazing earnestly on her babe.

"Do you not see it?" she asked, at length.

The emphasis was so marked that Catherine perfectly well understood that she was dwelling on that likeness to its father in which she had so much delighted.

"It is very marked," Catherine answered, feelingly; and a fervent kiss was impressed upon the child by its surviving parent. The next words, following after a long interval, showed that her thoughts had taken another course. Looking up, with an expression of profound distress, she said, "I was not with him; that is such a misery!"

"You could hardly have borne it!"

"He suffered dreadfully then! I know he did—I

saw it in his face!" pressing her hands on her own.

"Dear Emma, the anguish is past; and it was so well borne, with such deep submission! Do not bewail it now."

The tears whose torrent had seemed exhausted now flowed afresh, and brought relief. The next intelligible words were,—

"You were with him—he left some word for me?"

"Yes; but you cannot yet bear to hear it."

"Oh, yes, I can; tell me all!"

"Not now: I should disobey his parting charge."

She could not be easily dissuaded from her anxious desire.

"Indeed I am able to hear it," she said, pleadingly.

"As you love him, do not urge me!"

"Love," not "loved"—advisedly was it spoken: it diffused a calm over the mourner's soul. The appeal reminded her of a tie death had not broken, binding still together the spirit disembodied and that yet in the flesh. In accents of

composure, though of deepest sadness, Lady Emma asked, "Did he speak of *her* too?"

"Yes, fondly." Catherine could not say more: she was too strongly affected by the remembrance of the tone in which the dying father had alluded to his child.

After another long silence Lady Emma resumed, "She is still unbaptized: it was very, very wrong —I own it, with all my soul! It was delayed from a wish of mine that it should be *here*. And so it must be still—Mrs. Falconbridge, would she be sponsor?"

"Most gladly, I am sure."

"She was so kind—even *then* I felt it. That church, is it not *there?*" she asked, expressively.

The heavy toll of a bell, borne on the morning breeze from Ardwell Church, announced the conclusion of the funeral ceremony. The dull, deep note seemed knelled out as in answer to the question. Catherine was startled beyond recollection; she changed colour, could hardly repress her tears. Lady Emma, unaware of what was passing, heard not the sound, and attributed Catherine's sudden

agitation to the having been over-tried by her inquiries.

"Forgive me!" she said, affectionately; "I will ask no more now. Do go and take rest: leave me with baby. You are so dear to me! next to her, I love you best of all on earth!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN Ardwell Church, hung in black for its father's recent interment, an infant was presented at the font.

"Henrietta Maria Catherine" was the name given; and tenderly was it pressed to the heart of her who took the vow in its behalf.

Of the few spectators all were deeply touched; but, perhaps, none more than the old man Jervis. He could not without a keen sense of self-reproach descry, far apart from the rest, a slight, drooping figure, veiled in deepest mourning. Strange it was, the Manor was coming to the right hands at last, and yet he could hardly rejoice!

Colonel Falconbridge had found his last endeavour utterly hopeless. He had talked with

Marshall, heard all she had to depose, had seen the original will, and not even he could fail to recognize that the evidence was nothing worth, the writing mere waste-paper. Wrought up almost to frenzied desperation, he turned homewards. Beechwood lay directly in his way; he traversed the outer bounds, pausing ever and anon, as if to rekindle his own ire by looking around, then, after a stamp of passion, a muttered imprecation, resuming his course. He arrived at the Rectory to find him dying whom he so envied, so hated as having wrenched from him that fair domain. His wife's, his own, it never would be; but already it was their son's—Langley Falconbridge was now the Lord of Beechwood Manor! Catherine's earnest pleadings had produced more effect than she was herself aware. The testatrix, though determined not to forego the lustre of her connexion with the Beauchamps, became somewhat ashamed of her previous purpose of wholly discarding him. Her compunction carried her so far as to place him next in succession, should Lord Henry leave no son.

This clause sufficed to quiet her own conscience,

but was little regarded by either of the parties whom it affected. It troubled not Lord Henry, in the pride of youth and strength, to know that he might chance to be followed by a stranger; while Colonel Falconbridge, stung by personal disappointment, cared nothing for a possible benefit to some future descendant. Yet had this provision already become the only important part of the will.

But the late owner of Beechwood had most carefully provided against the remotest chance of the father having the management, even for the briefest space, of the son's estate. The trust was vested, during Langley's minority, in Mr. Rashleigh, to devolve in the event of his decease on the eldest surviving of his seven sons.

Arrived at man's estate, Langley's first care was to discharge his father's debts, and to assign him, independently, an income fully adequate to his station. He then sought out all those claiming kindred with his deceased godmother. The pedigree of these poor people was not minutely investigated, the object in view being that none should by any chance be left unsuccoured. He in whose

rude letter the first will had originated, had long been released from earthly cares; but his son, the little messenger on that occasion, now an honest labourer, owed to the young Lord of the Manor whatever could promote his happiness in his humble walk in life.

Was he come at last, who should, according to the old legend, merit to transmit Beechwood Manor to his heirs? Not, perhaps, till his course was run, could final judgment be passed, but the bright commencement warranted the hope. Far and near the name of Langley Falconbridge was known for deeds of good to all men; and yet greater was the number of those who knew not the hand which dispersed among them, in pious thankfulness, the blessings of the All-Gracious Giver.

The Duchess of Ilminster testified the most passionate sorrow at Lord Henry's untimely fate. She really had entertained for him her utmost measure of regard. But at her second interview with her widowed niece, her Grace, though still in the deepest distress, found some consolation. She had never before believed it possible that any woman should look so lovely in weeds! The

Coningsby brow would bear any thing! In a short time she began to insinuate that excessive sorrow was certainly unreasonable, it could not recall the departed. Soon she assumed a more decided tone, talked of what "was due to society," and other such vague, indefinable obligations. Lady Emma recoiled from the advice, declaring it to be her fixed resolve not again to mingle in general society. The Duchess heard the avowal with utter dismay. What! renounce the world at two and twenty! Had the man ever existed who merited such a sacrifice? From thenceforth all cordiality was at an end. Lady Emma had not shown that deference to her judgment which she might fairly have expected. People must act according to their own ideas. And her Grace, accordingly, acting fully up to hers, concluded her career the same thoughtless, heartless being she had entered upon it.

In place of this friend Lady Emma found another, and a truer. Hardly could she believe, the first time they met, that it really was Lady Donnington who embraced and wept over her, with a pity too deep for words! But the sympathy was as enduring as it was sincere—it made way for

a contrite sense of past unkindness, for other dispositions of a gentle nature. The childless mother was attracted strongly by the little Henrietta, delighting to dwell on her affinity, remote as it was, to her own lost son. And this affection, it may be well believed, cemented firmly the union between her and her husband's granddaughter.

Some time elapsed before Catherine could venture to deliver Lord Henry's parting charge, nor was she surprised that it did not immediately produce the desired effect.

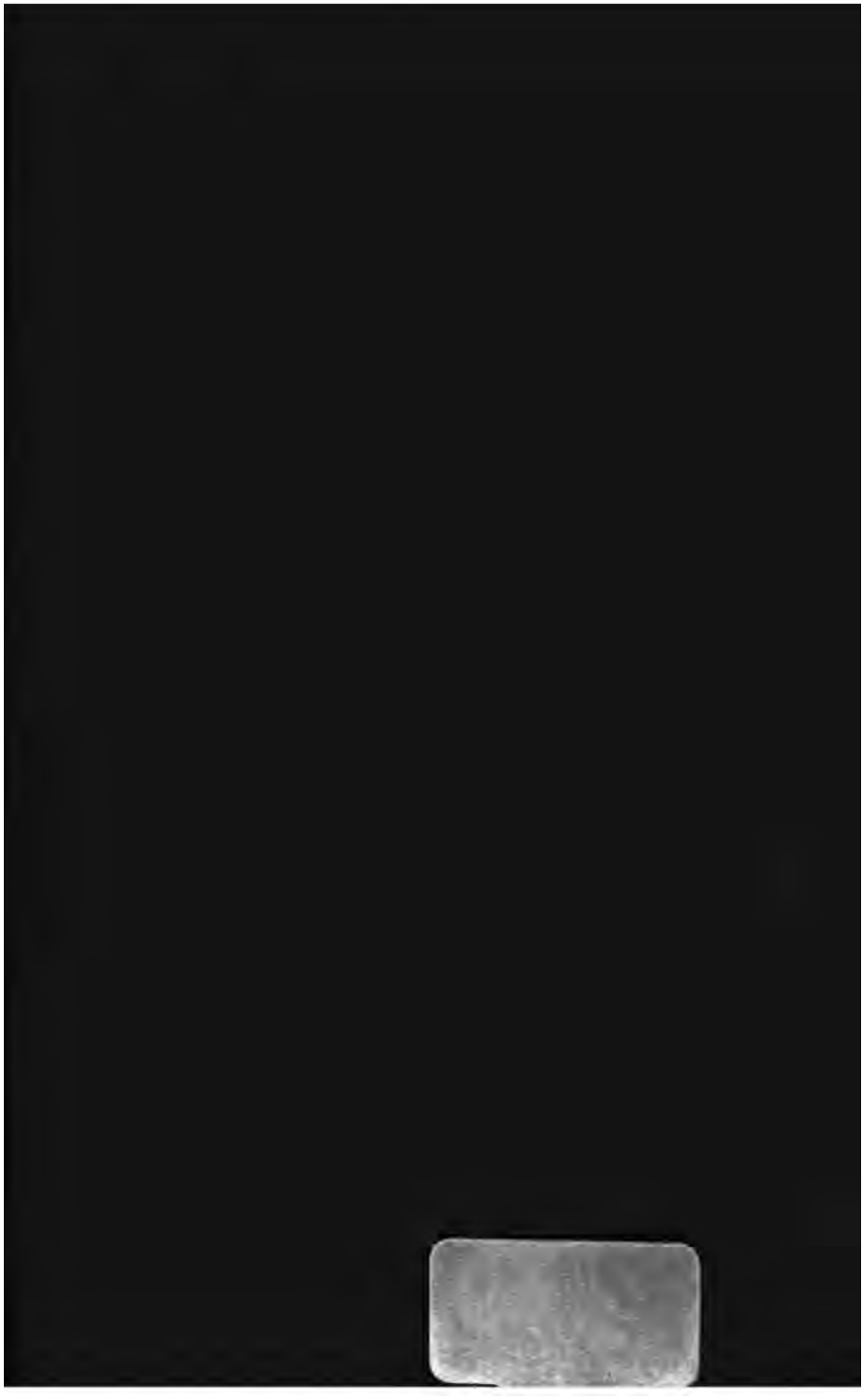
Lady Emma could not endure to view her husband as he himself had done.

"Did he say *this* to comfort me?" she replied, with deep emotion.

But the words sank into her heart, and gradually fulfilled the purpose for which, with such painful effort, they had been breathed. As her own sense of duty became more confirmed, she recognized the truth of his severe self-judgment. Then was his reliance on the disinterested character of her affection fully justified. The love whose purity he knew so well proved, as he had

trusted it would, its own surest, deepest, most unfailing consolation. She never breathed her thoughts to human ear; they scarcely found language even in her inmost heart; but ever to this conclusion they came:—

"Far better thus: he is safe from further temptation. Rather than his greater danger, any length of loneliness for me!"

THE END.

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